

# **The Growth of the Soil**

## **Knut Hamsun**

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With an essay "Knut Hamsun" by W. W.  
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Knut Hamsun is now sixty. For years past he has been regarded as the greatest of living Norwegian writers, but he is still little known in England. One or two attempts have been made previously to introduce Hamsun's work into this country, but it was not until this year, with the publication of *Growth of the Soil*, that he achieved any real success, or became at all generally known, among English readers.

*Growth of the Soil* (Markens Gröde) is Hamsun's latest work. Its reception here was one of immediate and unstinted appreciation, such as is rarely accorded to a translated work by an alien author practically unknown even to the critics. A noticeable feature was the frankness with which experienced bookmen laid aside stock phrases, and dealt with this book as in response to a strong personal appeal. To the reviewer, aged with much knowledge, hardened by much handling of mediocrity, it is a relief to meet with a book that can and must be dealt with so.

Those readers are, perhaps, most fortunate who come upon such a book as this without foretaste or preparation. To the mind under spell of an aesthetic or emotional appeal, the steps that went to make it, the stages whereby the author passed, are as irrelevant as the logarithms that went to build an aeroplane. Yet it is only by knowledge of such steps that the achievement can be fully understood.

*Growth of the Soil* is very far indeed from Hamsun's earliest beginnings: far even from the books of his early middle period, which made his name. It is the life story of a man in the wilds, the genesis and gradual development of a homestead, the unit of humanity, in the untilled, uncleared tracts that still remain in the Norwegian Highlands. It is an epic of earth; the history of a microcosm. Its dominant note is one of patient strength and simplicity; the mainstay of its working is the tacit, stern, yet loving alliance between Nature and the Man who faces her himself, trusting to himself and her for the physical means of life, and the spiritual contentment with life which she must grant if he be worthy. Modern man faces Nature only by proxy, or as proxy, through others or for others, and the intimacy is lost. In the wilds the contact is direct and immediate; it is the foothold upon earth, the touch of the soil itself, that gives strength.

The story is epic in its magnitude, in its calm, steady progress and unhurrying rhythm, in its vast and intimate humanity. The author looks upon his characters with a great, all-tolerant sympathy, aloof yet kindly, as a god. A more objective work of fiction it would be hard to find — certainly in what used to be called "the neurasthenic North."

And this from the pen of the man who wrote *Sult*, *Mysterier*, and *Pan*.

Hamsun's early work was subjective in the extreme; so much so, indeed, as almost to lie outside the limits of aesthetic composition. As a boy he wrote verse under difficulties — he was born in Gudbrandsdalen, but came as a child to Bodø in Lofoten, and worked with a shoemaker there for some years, saving up money for the publication of his juvenile efforts. He had little education to speak of, and after a period of varying casual occupations, mostly of the humblest sort, he came to

Christiania with the object of studying there, but failed to hit way. Thrice he essayed his fortune in America, but without success. For three years he worked as a fisherman on the Newfoundland Banks.

His Nordland origin is in itself significant; it means an environment of month-long nights and concentrated summers, in which all feelings are intensified, and love and dread and gratitude and longing are nearer and deeper than in milder and more temperate regions, where elemental opposites are, as it were, reciprocally diluted.

In 1890, at the age of thirty, Hamsun attracted attention by the publication of *Sult* (Hunger). *Sult* is a record of weeks of starvation in a city; the semi-delirious confession of a man whose physical and mental faculties have slipped beyond control. He speaks and acts irrationally, and knows it, watches himself at his mental antics and takes himself to task for the same. And he asks himself: Is it a sign of madness?

It might seem so. The extraordinary associations, the weird fancies and bizarre impulses that are here laid bare give an air of convincing verisimilitude to the supposed confessions of a starving journalist. But, as a matter of fact, Hamsun has no need of extraneous influences to invest his characters with originality. Starving or fed, they can be equally erratic. This is seen in his next book, *Mysterier*.

Here we have actions and reactions as fantastic as in *Sult*, though the hero has here no such excuse as in the former case. The “mysteries,” or mystifications, of Nagel, a stranger who comes, for no particular reason apparent, to stay in a little Norwegian town, arise entirely out of Nagel’s own personality.

*Mysterier* is one of the most exasperating books that a publisher’s reader, or a conscientious reviewer, could be given to deal with. An analysis of the principal character is a most baffling task. One is tempted to call him mad, and have done with it. But, as a matter of fact, he is uncompromisingly, unrestrainedly human; he goes about constantly saying and doing things that we, ordinary and respectable people, are trained and accustomed to refrain from saying or doing at all. He has the self-consciousness of a sensitive child; he is for ever thinking of what people think of him, and trying to create an impression. Then, with a paradoxical sincerity, he confesses that the motive of this or that action was simply to create an impression, and thereby destroys the impression. Sometimes he caps this by wilfully letting it appear that the double move was carefully designed to produce the reverse impression of the first — until the person concerned is utterly bewildered, and the reader likewise.

*Mysterier* appeared in 1893. In the following year Hamsun astonished his critics with two books, *Ny Jord* (New Ground) and *Redaktör Lynge*, both equally unlike his previous work. With these he passes at a bound from one-man stories, portrait studies of eccentric characters in a remote or restricted environment, to group objects, chosen from centres of life and culture in Christiania. *Redaktör Lynge* — *redaktör*, of course, means “editor” — deals largely with political manoeuvres and intrigues, the bitter controversial politics of Norway prior to the dissolution of the Union with Sweden. *Ny Jord* gives an unflattering picture of the academic, literary, and artistic youth of the capital, idlers for the most part, arrogant, unscrupulous, self-important, and full of disdain for the mere citizens and merchants whose simple honesty and kindness are laughed at or exploited by the newly dominant representatives of culture.

Both these books are technically superior to the first two, inasmuch as they show mastery of a more difficult form. But their appeal is not so great; there is lacking a something that might be inspiration, personal sympathy — some indefinable essential that the author himself has taught us to expect. They are less *hamsunsk* than most of Hamsun's work. Hamsun is at his best among the scenes and characters he loves; tenderness and sympathy make up so great a part of his charm that he is hardly recognizable in surroundings or society uncongenial to himself.

It would almost seem as if he realized something of this. For in his next work he turns from the capital to the Nordland coast, reverting also, in some degree, to the subjective, keenly sensitive manner of *Sult*, though now with more restraint and concentration.

*Pan* (1894) is probably Hamsun's best-known work. It is a love-story, but of an extraordinary type, and is, moreover, important from the fact that we are here introduced to some of the characters and types that are destined to reappear again and again in his later works.

Nagel, the exasperating irresponsible of *Mysterier*, is at his maddest in his behaviour towards the woman he loves. It is natural that this should be so. When a man is intoxicated his essential qualities are emphasized. If he have wit, he will be witty; if a brutal nature, he will be a brute; if he be of a melancholy temper, he will be disposed to sit upon the ground and tell sad stories of the death of kings.

We see this in *Pan*. The love-making of the hero is characterized by the same irrational impulses, the same extravagant actions, as in *Sult* and *Mysterier*. But they are now less frequent and less involved. The book as a whole is toned down, so to speak, from the bewildering tangle of unrestraint in the first two. There is quite sufficient of the erratic and unusual in the character of Glahn, the hero, but the tone is more subdued. The madcap youth of genius has realized that the world looks frigidly at its vagaries, and the secretly proud "*au mains je suis autre*" — more a boast than a confession — gives place to a wistful, apologetic admission of the difference as a fault. Here already we have something of that resignation which comes later to its fulness in the story of the Wanderer with the Mute.

The love-story in *Pan* takes the form of a conflict; it is one of those battles between the sexes, duels of wit and *esprit*, such as one finds in the plays of Marivaux. But Hamsun sets his battle in the sign of the heart, not of the head; it is a *marivaudage* of feeling, none the less deep for its erratic utterance. Moreover, the scene is laid, not in salons and ante-chambers, but in a landscape such as Hamsun loves, the forest-clad hills above a little fishing village, between the *höifjeld* and the sea. And interwoven with the story, like an eerie breathing from the dark of woods at dusk and dawn, is the haunting presence of Iselin, *la belle dame sans merci*.

Otto Weininger, the author of *Sex and Character*, said of *Pan* that it was "perhaps the most beautiful novel ever written." Weininger, of course, was an extremist, and few would accept his judgment with out reserve. It is doubtful whether any writer nowadays would venture to make such a claim for any book at all.

*Pan* is a book that offends against all sorts of rules; as a literary product it is eminently calculated to elicit, especially in England, the Olympian "this will never do." To begin with, it is not so much a novel as a *novella* — a form of art little cultivated in this country, but which lends itself excellently to delicate artistic handling, and the creation of that subtle influence which Hamsun's countrymen call

*stemning*, poorly rendered by the English “atmosphere.” The epilogue is disproportionately long; the portion written as by another hand is all too recognizably in the style of the rest. And with all his chivalrous sacrifice and violent end, Glahn is at best a quixotic hero. Men, as men, would think him rather a fool, and women, as women, might flush at the thought of a cavalier so embarrassingly unrestrained. He is not to be idolized as a cinema star, or the literary gymnastic hero of a perennial Earl’s Court Exhibition set to music on the stage. He could not be truthfully portrayed on a flamboyant wrapper as at all seductively masculine. In a word, he is neither a man’s man nor a woman’s man. But he is a human being, keenly susceptible to influence which most of us have felt in some degree.

Closely allied to *Pan* is *Victoria*, likewise a story of conflict between two lovers. The actual plot can only be described as hackneyed. Girl and boy, the rich man’s daughter and the poor man’s son, playmates in youth, then separated by the barriers of social standing — few but the most hardened of “best-sellers” catering for semi-detached suburbia would venture nowadays to handle such a theme. Yet Hamsun dares, and so insistently unlike all else is the impress of his personality that the mechanical structure of the story is forgotten. It is interspersed with irrelevant fancies, visions and imaginings, a chain of tied notes heard as an undertone through the action on the surface. The effect is that of something straining towards an impossible realization; abetting of wings in the void; a striving for utterance of things beyond speech.

*Victoria* is the swan-song of Hamsun’s subjective period. Already, in the three plays which appeared during the years immediately following *Pan*, he faces the merciless law of change; the unrelenting “forward” which means leaving loved things behind. Kareno, student of life, begins his career in resolute opposition to the old men, the established authorities who stand for compromise and resignation. For twenty years he remains obstinately faithful to his creed, that the old men must step aside or be thrust aside, to make way for the youth that will be served. “What has age that youth has not? Experience. Experience, in all its poor and withered nakedness. And what use is their experience to us, who must make our own in every single happening of life? In *Aftenrøde*, the “Sunset” of the trilogy, Kareno himself deserts the cause of youth, and allies himself to the party in power. And the final scene shows him telling a story to a child: “There was once a man who never would give way. . . .”

The madness of *Sult* is excused as being delirium, due to physical suffering. Nagel, in *Mysterier*, is shown as a fool, an eccentric intolerable in ordinary society, though he is disconcertingly human, paradoxically sane. Glahn, in *Pan*, apologizes for his uncouth straightforwardness by confessing that he is more at home in the woods, where he can say and do what he pleases without offense. Johannes, in *Victoria*, is of humble birth, which counts in extenuation of his unmannerly frankness in early years. Later he becomes a poet, and as such is exempt in some degree from the conventional restraint imposed on those who aspire to polite society. All these well-chosen characters are made to serve the author’s purpose as channels for poetic utterance that might otherwise seem irrelevant. The extent to which this is done may be seen from the way in which Hamsun lets a character in one book enter upon a theme which later becomes the subject of an independent work by the author himself. Thus Glahn is haunted by visions of Diderik and Iselin; Johannes writes fragments supposed to be spoken by one Vendt the Monk. Five

years after Victoria, Hamsun gives us the romantic drama of *Munken Vendt*, in which Diderik and Iselin appear.

Throughout these early works, Hamsun is striving to find expression for his own sensitive personality; a form and degree of expression sufficient to relieve his own tension of feeling, without fusing the medium; adequate to his own needs, yet understandable and tolerable to ordinary human beings; to the readers of books. The process, in effect, is simply this: Hamsun is a poet, with a poet's deep and unusual feeling, and a poet's need of utterance. To gain a hearing, he chooses figures whom he can conveniently represent as fools. Secretly, he loves them, for they are himself. But to the world he can present them with a polite apology, a plea for kindly indulgence.

It is not infrequent in literature to find the wisest and most poignant utterances thus laid in the mouths of poor men clad in motley. Some of the most daring things in Shakespeare, the newest heresies of the Renaissance, are voiced by irresponsibles. Of all dramatic figures, that of the fool is most suited to the expression of concentrated feeling. There is an arresting question in a play of recent years, which runs something like this: "Do you think that the things people make fools of themselves about are any less real and true than the things they behave sensibly about?"

Most of us have at some time or another felt that uncomfortable, almost indecently denuding question which comes to us at rare moments from the stage where some great drama is being played: What is higher, what is more real: this, or the life we live? In that sudden flash, the matters of today's and tomorrow's reality in our minds appear as vulgar trifles, things of which we are ashamed. The feeling lasts but a moment; for a moment we have been something higher than ourselves, in the mere desire so to be. Then we fall back to ourselves once more, to the lower levels upon which alone we can exist. And yet it is by such potentials that we judge the highest art; by its power to give us, if only for a moment, something of that which the divinity of our aspiring minds finds wanting in the confines of reality.

The richness of this quality is one of the most endearing things in Hamsun's characters. Their sensitiveness is a thing we have been trained, for self-defence, to repress. It is well for us, no doubt, that this is so. But we are grateful for their showing that such things *are*, as we are grateful for Kensington Gardens who cannot live where trees are everywhere. The figures Hamsun sets before us as confessedly unsuited to the realities of life, his vagabonds, his failures, his fools, have power at times to make us question whether our world of comfort, luxury, success, is what we thought; if it were not well lost in exchange for the power to *feel* as they.

It has been said that life is a comedy to those who think, a tragedy to those who feel. Humanly speaking, it is one of the greatest merits of Hamsun's work that he shows otherwise. His attitude towards life is throughout one of feeling, yet he makes of life no tragedy, but a beautiful story.

"I will be young until I die," says Kareno in *Aftenrøde*. The words are not so much a challenge to fate as a denial of fact; he is not fighting, only refusing to acknowledge the power that is already hard upon him.

Kareno is an *intellectual* character. He is a philosopher, a man whose perceptions and activity lie predominantly in the sphere of thought, not of feeling. His attempt to carry the fire of youth beyond the grave of youth ends in disaster; an unnecessary *débâcle* due to his gratuitously attempting the impossible.

Hamsun's poet-personality, the spirit we have seen striving for expression through the figures of Nagel, Glahn, Johannes, and the rest, is a creature of *feeling*. And here the development proceeds on altogether different lines. The emotion which fails to find adequate outlet, even in such works as *Sult*, *Mysterier*, *Victoria*, and *Pan*, might well seem more of a peril than the quixotic stubbornness of Karen's philosophy. Such a flood, in its tempestuous unrest, might seem to threaten destruction, or at best the vain dispersal of its own power into chaos. But by some rare guidance it is led, after the storm of *Munken Vendt*, into channels of beneficent fertility.

In 1904, after an interval of short stories, letters of travel, and poems, came the story entitled *Sværmere*. The word means "Moths." It also stands for something else; something for which we English, as a sensible people, have no word. Some thing pleasantly futile, deliciously unprofitable — foolish lovers, hovering like moths about a lamp.

But there is more than this that is untranslatable in the title. As a title it suggests an attitude of gentleness, tenderness, sympathy, toward whomsoever it describes. It is a new note in Hamsun; the opening of a new *motif*.

The main thread of the story bears a certain similarity to that of *Mysterier*, *Victoria*, and *Pan*, being a love affair of mazy windings, a tangled skein of loves-me-loves-me-not. But it is pure comedy throughout. Rolandsen, the telegraph operator in love with Elsie Mack, is no poet; he has not even any pretensions to education or social standing. He is a cheerful, riotous "blade," who sports with the girls of the village, gets drunk at times, and serenades the parson's wife at night with his guitar. *Sværmere* is the slightest of little stories in itself, but full of delightful vagaries and the most winning humour.

The story of *Benoni*, with its continuation *Rosa*, is in like vein; a tenderly humorous portrayal of love below stairs, the principal characters being chosen from the class who appear as supers in *Pan*; subjects or retainers of the all-powerful Trader Mack. It is as if the sub-plots in one of Shakespeare's plays had been taken out for separate presentment, and the clown promoted to be hero in a play of his own. The cast is increased, the *milieu* lightly drawn in *Pan* is now shown more comprehensively and in detail, making us gradually acquainted with a whole little community, a village world, knowing little of any world beyond, and forming a microcosm in itself.

Hamsun has returned, as it were, to the scene of his passionate youth, but in altered guise. He plays no part himself now, but is an onlooker, a stander-by, chronicling, as from a cloistered aloofness, yet I with kindly wisdom always, the little things that matter in the lives of those around him. Wisdom and kindliness, sympathy and humour and understanding, these are the dominant notes of the new phase. *Sværmere* ends happily — for it is a story of other people's lives. So also with *Benoni* and *Rosa* at the last. And so surely has the author established his foothold on the new ground that he can even bring in Edvarda, the "Iselin" figure from *Pan*, once more, linking up his brave and lusty comedies of middle age with the romantic tragedies of his youth, making a comprehensive pageant-play of large-hearted humanity.

Meantime, the effect upon himself is seen — and avowed. Between *Sværmere* and *Benoni* comes the frankly first-personal narrative of a vagabond who describes

himself, upon interrogation, as “Knut Pedersen” — which is two-thirds of Knut Pedersen Hamsund — and hailing from Nordland — which embraces Lofoten.

It does not need any showing of paper, however, to establish the identity of Knut Pedersen, vagabond, with the author of Pan. The opening words of the book (“Under Høststjærnen”) are enough. “Indian summer, mild and warm . . . it is many years now since I knew such peace. Twenty or thirty years maybe — or maybe it was in another life. But I have felt it some time, surely, since I go about now humming a little tune; go about rejoicing, loving every straw and every stone, and feeling as if they cared for me in return. . . .”

This is the Hamsun of Pan. But Hamsun now is a greater soul than in the days when Glahn, the solitary dweller in the woods, picked up a broken twig from the ground and held it lovingly, because it looked poor and forsaken; or thanked the hillock of stone outside his hut because it stood there faithfully, as a friend that waited his return. He is stronger now, but no less delicate; he loves not Nature less, but the world more. He has learned to love his fellow-men. Knut Pedersen, vagabond, wanders about the country with his tramp-companions, Grindhusen, the painter who can ditch and delve at a pinch, or Falkenberg, farm-labourer in harvest-time, and piano-tuner where pianos are. Here is brave comradeship, the sharing of adventures, the ready wit of jovial vagrants. The book is a harmless picaresque, a *geste* of innocent rogue errantry; its place is with Lavengro and The Cloister and the Hearth, in that ancient, endless order of tales which link up age with age and land with land in the unaltering, unfettered fellowship of the road that kept the spirit of poetry alive through the Dark Ages.

The vagabond from Nordland has his own adventures, his *bonnes fortunes*. There is a touch of Sterne about the book; not the exaggerated super-Sterne of Tristram Shandy, with eighteenth-century futurist blanks and marbled pages, but the fluent, casual, follow-your-fancy Sterne of the Sentimental Journey. Yet the vagabond himself is unobtrusive, ready to step back and be a chronicler the moment other figures enter into constellation. He moves among youth, himself no longer young, and among gentlefolk, as one making no claim to equal rank.

Both these features are accentuated further in the story of the Wanderer with the Mute. It is a continuation of Under Høststjærnen, and forms the culmination, the acquiescent close, of the self-expressional series that began with Sult. The discords of tortured loveliness are now resolved into an ultimate harmony of comeley resignation and rich content. “A Wanderer may come to fifty years he plays more softer then. Plays with muted strings.” This is the keynote of the book. The Wanderer is no longer young; it is for youth to make the stories old men tell. Tragedy is reserved for those of high estate; a wanderer in corduroy, “such as labourers wear here in the south,” can tell the story of his chatelaine and her lovers with the self-repression of a humbler Henry Esmond, winning nothing for himself even at the last, yet feeling he is still in Nature’s debt.

Hamsun’s next work is Den Siste Glæde (literally “The Last Joy”). The title as it stands is expressive. The substantive is “joy” — but it is so qualified by the preceding “last,” a word of overwhelming influence in any combination, that the total effect is one of sadness. And the book itself is masterly presentment of gloom. Masterly — or most natural: it is often hard to say how much of Hamsun’s effect is due to superlative technique and how much to the inspired disregard of all technique. Den Silts Glæde is a diary of wearisome days, spent for the most part



among unattractive, insignificant people at a holiday resort; the only “action” in it is an altogether pitiful love affair, in which the narrator is involved to the slightest possible degree. The writer is throughout despondent; he feels himself out of the race; his day is past. Solitude and quiet, Nature, and his own foolish feelings — these are the “last joys” left him now.

The book might have seemed a fitting, if pathetic, ending to the literary career of the author of *Pan*. Certainly it holds out no promise of further energy or interest in life or work. The closing words amount to a personal farewell.

Then, without warning, Hamsun enters upon a new phase of power. Born an *Tilden* (*Children of the Age*) is an objective study, its main theme being the “marriage” conflict touched upon in the *Wanderer* stories, and here developed in a different setting and with fuller individuality. Hamsun has here moved up a step in the social scale, from villagers of the *Benoni* type to the land-owning class. There is the same conflict of temperaments that we have seen before, but less violent now; the poet’s late-won calm of mind, and the level of culture from which his characters now are drawn — perhaps by instinctive selection — make for restraint. Still a romantic at heart, he becomes more classic in form.

*Börn an Tilden* is also the story of *Segelfoss*, in its passing from the tranquil dignity of a semi-feudal estate to the complex and ruthless modernity of an industrial centre. *Segelfoss By* (1915) treats of the fortunes of the succeeding generation, and the further development of *Segelfoss* into a township (“*By*”).

Then, with *Growth of the Soil* Hamsun achieves his greatest triumph. Setting aside all that mattered most to himself, he turns, with the experience of a lifetime rich in conflict, to the things that matter to us all. Deliberately shorn of all that makes for mere effect, *Isak* stands out as an elemental figure, the symbol of Man at his best, face to face with Nature and life. There is no greater human character — reverently said — in the Bible itself.

These, then, are the steps of Hamsun’s progress as an author, from the passionate chaos of *Sult* to the Miltonic, monumental calm of *Growth of the Soil*. The stages in themselves are full of beauty; the wistfulness of *Pan* and *Victoria*, the kindly humour of *Sværner* and *Benoni*, the autumn tinted resignation of the *Wanderer* with the *Mute* — they follow as the seasons do, each with a charm of its own, yet all deriving from one source. His muse at first is *Iselin*, the embodiment of adolescent longing, the dream of those “whom delight flies because they give her chase.” The hopelessness of his own pursuit fills him with pity for mortals under the same spell, and he steps aside to be a brave, encouraging chorus, or a kindly chronicler of others’ lives. And his reward is the love of a greater divinity, the goddess of field and homestead. No will-o’-the-wisp, but a presence of wisdom and calm.

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# PART ONE

## I

That long, long path over the moors and into the forest, who has trodden it? Man, a human being, the first one who came here. There was no path before him. Later a few animals followed the faint tracks over the heaths and moors and made them clearer, and still later a few Lapps began to nose out the path and to use it when they were going from one mountain to another to see to their reindeer. This is how the path through the great common, the no-man's-land owned by no one, came into being.

A man comes walking north. He carries a sack, the first sack, containing provisions for the road and some implements. The man is strong and rough-hewn, with a red iron beard and little scars on face and hands, sites of old wounds—were they gotten at work or in a fight? Maybe he has been in jail and wants to go into hiding, or perhaps he is a philosopher looking for peace; in any case, here he comes, a human being in the midst of this immense solitude. He walks and walks, in a silence broken by neither bird nor beast; occasionally he speaks some word or other to himself. “Oh Lord!” he says. When, after crossing the moors, he comes upon a nice spot, an open space in the forest, he puts down his sack and starts walking about to examine the lay of the land; after a while he returns, throws the sack on his shoulder and walks on. This goes on all day; he can tell the time of day by the sun, and at nightfall he throws himself on his arm in the heather.

After a few hours he walks again—“oh Lord!”—walks straight north, telling the time by the sun; he snacks on a piece of flatbread and goat cheese, drinking water from a creek, and continues on. This day, too, is spent trekking, for he has to examine so many nice spots in the forest. What is he looking for?<sup>1</sup>

For land, for a bit of ground? Maybe he is an emigrant from some village; he keeps his eyes open and observes carefully, occasionally climbing a hill to have a look around. Now the sun goes down again.

He is walking on the western flank of a valley with mixed forest, leafy trees and grassland; hours go by and it's getting dark, but he hears the low murmur of a stream, and this low murmur cheers him like a living thing. When he gets up on the height, he can see the valley in semi-darkness below and, in the south farthest out, the sky. He lies down for the night.

In the morning he faces a landscape of woods and pasture land. Going down, he comes upon a green hillside; far below he sees a glimpse of the stream and a hare jumping across it. The man nods, as if it's just right that the stream is no wider than a jump. A brooding ptarmigan suddenly flies up at his feet, hissing fiercely at him, and the man nods again, meaning there are beasts and birds around, just right once more! He walks through blueberry and lingonberry heather, through seven-pointed starflowers and low ferns; when he stops here and there and pokes around in the ground with a piece of iron, he finds mold in one place and bog in another, manured by thousands of years of fallen leaves and rotten twigs. The man nods, to say that here he will settle down—and, indeed, he does, he settles down. For two days he continues to roam around in the area, but returns to the hillside in the evening. At night he sleeps on a bed of evergreens; he has come to feel very much at home here, being already the owner of a bed of evergreens under a cliff.

The worst part had been to find the place, this no man's place, yet his; now his days were taken up with work. He started at once to strip birch bark, while the sap was still in the trees, keeping to the more distant woods; he pressed and dried the bark, and when he had a sizable load he carried it all those miles back to the village and sold it for use in construction. And back home to the hillside he carried fresh bags of victuals and tools—flour, pork, a pot, a spade—walking the trail back and forth, carrying and carrying. A born carrier, a barge plowing through the forest, he seemed, in fact, to love his calling of much walking and heavy carrying, as though not having a load on his back was a lazy way of life and nothing for him.

One day when he returned with his heavy load, he was leading three goats, two females and one male, on a leash. He was happy about his goats, as if they were milk cows, and treated them kindly. When the first stranger came by, a wandering Lapp, he understood on seeing the goats that he had come to a man who had settled there. “Will you be living here for good?” he asked. “Yes,” the man replied. “What's your name?”—“Isak. You wouldn't know of a woman who could help me out, would you?”—“No. But I'll drop a word where I pass by.”—“Do so! Say I have animals and no one to look after them.”

Isak, uh-huh, the Lapp would mention that too; the man was no runaway, he gave his name. He a runaway? Then he had been found. He was only a tireless toiler; he cut winter feed for his goats and began to clear land, turn up the soil, carry away stones and build stone fences. In the fall he put together a dwelling, a hut of turf, tight and warm; it didn't creak in a gale and it couldn't burn down. He could walk into this home, close the door and stay there, he could stand on the door slab outside and own the whole building if someone came by. The hut was divided in two parts: at one end he lived himself, at the other the animals, and farthest in, against the rock wall, he had set up his hayshed. It was all there.

A couple more Lapps come by, father and son; resting both hands on their long staffs, they take in the hut and the clearing and the sound of goat bells up on the hillside.

“Oh, hullo,” they say. “Well, what fine folks have come to live in the wilds!” The Lapps always fawn on people.

“You wouldn't know where I can find a woman to help me out, would you?” Isak answers. He has nothing but this one thing in his head.

“A woman to help out? No. But we’ll drop a word about it.”— “If you’d be so kind. And I have a house and some land and animals, but no woman to help out, say that.”

Oh, he had looked for this woman helper every time he was down in the village with his birch bark, but found none. They had looked him over—a widow, a couple of elderly spinsters—but not dared promise him any help, whatever the reason might be; Isak didn’t understand. Didn’t he understand? Who would go into service with a man way up in the wilderness, miles and miles away from people—a whole day’s journey to the nearest human dwelling! And the man himself wasn’t the least bit sweet or charming, quite the contrary, and when he spoke he was no tenor with his eyes heavenward, but his voice was rather brutish and rough.

So he would have to manage by himself.

During the winter he made large wooden troughs and sold them in the village, carrying sacks of food and implements back home through the snow; those were hard days for him, fastened as he was to a load. Since he had animals with no one else to look after them, he couldn’t leave them for long at a time, so how did he manage? Necessity sparks invention—his brain was strong and unused, he trained it to do more and more. The first thing he did before leaving home was to let out the goats so they could get their fill of sprigs in the woods. But he also knew another way out: he hung up a washtub, a large vessel, by the stream and let it fill up one drop at a time; it took fourteen hours to fill it. When the tub was full to the brim, it had acquired just the right weight and dropped down, but as it dropped it pulled a line connected to the hayshed; a trap door opened and three goat feeds fell through: the animals were fed.

This was how he managed.

An ingenious idea, an inspiration from God maybe, the man was resourceful. It worked well until late fall when the snow came, then rain, then more snow, lasting snow; then the machinery malfunctioned, the vessel was filled by the precipitation and opened the trap door too early. The man covered the tub, making things work again for a while, but when winter came the dripping water froze to ice and the machinery stopped altogether.

Then his goats, like the man himself, had to learn to do without.

Hard times. The man should have had some help, but having none he was still not at a loss what to do. Continuing the work of fixing up his home, he made a window in the hut, with two panes of glass; that was a remarkable day in his life, and a bright one. With no need to light a fire on the hearth in order to see, he could sit indoors and work at his wooden troughs in daylight. Things were getting better and brighter, good Lord, yes! He never read a book but often thought about God; it was unavoidable, a matter of simplicity and awe. The starry sky, the sighing of the forest, the solitude, the big snow, the majesty of the earth and what was above the earth filled him with a deep devoutness many times a day. He was sinful and godfearing; on Sundays he washed himself in honor of the holy day but worked as usual.

Spring came, he tilled his patch of ground and planted potatoes. His flock had increased by now, each she-goat having had twins, so there were seven goats altogether in the common. He enlarged the cowshed with a view to the future and put in a couple of panes there too. It was growing brighter, the light of day breaking in every way.

Then one day the help came. She wound her way back and forth on the hillside for a long time before daring to come forth, and by the time she got around to doing so it was evening; but then she came, a tall, brown-eyed girl, buxom and coarse, with a pair of good heavy hands. She was wearing boots of reindeer hide on her feet, though she was no Lapp, and carrying a calfskin bag on her back. She might be getting on in years, nearing thirty, putting it politely.

She greeted him and hastened to say, as if she were afraid of something, “I had an errand on the other side of the mountain, and so I took this trail.”—“I see,” the man said. He could barely understand her; she spoke so unclearly and, besides, turned her face away from him. “Yes,” she said. “And it’s a very long way.”—“Yes,” he replied. “Are you going over the mountain?”—“Yes.”—“What are you going there for?”—“I have my folks there.”—“Oh, you have your folks there. What’s your name?”—“Inger. And yours?”—“Isak.”—“Isak, I see. And you live here?”—“Yes, I live here, such as it is.”—“It’s not bad at all!” she said by way of praise.

He had become quite good at having second thoughts, and now it occurred to him that she had come on purpose, well, that she had left home the day before yesterday just to come here. Maybe she had heard that he was in want of a woman helper.

“Go in and rest your feet,” he said.

They entered the hut, ate of her food and drank his goat milk; then they made coffee, which she had brought in a bladder. They lingered pleasantly over their coffee before going to bed. At night he lay feeling greedy for her and took her.

In the morning she didn’t leave, nor did she leave the rest of the day, but made herself useful, milked the goats and scrubbed the pots with fine sand and got them clean. She never left. Inger was her name, Isak his.

Life changed for the lonely man. There was the hitch, of course, that his wife mumbled and constantly turned away from people because of her harelip, but that was nothing to complain about. Without this disfigured mouth she wasn’t likely to have come to him, the harelip was his good luck. And he himself, was he without blemish? Isak, with his iron beard and excessively trunk-like body, was like a horrible water troll, or like something seen through a whorl in the windowpane. And who else went around with such a look in his face! He seemed capable of turning loose a kind of Barabbas at any moment. It was a wonder that Inger didn’t run away.

She didn’t run away. Whenever he came back after an absence, Inger was there at the hut; the two of them were one, she and the turf hut.

It meant that there was another mouth to feed, but it paid off; he could get away more easily, was able to move. There was the stream, for example, a pleasant stream that, besides being pleasant to look at, was deep and swift; it was by no means a small stream, and it was bound to come from a big lake in the mountains. He got himself fishing gear, sought out the lake, and returned in the evening with a load of trout and char. Inger received him with astonishment; not being spoiled in the way of food, she felt overwhelmed, clapped her hands together and said, "Oh my, you're someone!" She must have noticed that he liked her praise and felt proud of it, for she said some more nice words: that she had never seen the likes, that she couldn't understand how he had done it!

In other ways, too, Inger was a blessing. Though she was no great shakes as far as brains went, she had two sheep, with lambs, at the place of some kin, and those she fetched. Nothing that was more needed could have been brought to the hut right now, sheep with wool and lambs, four lives; the flock was increasing on a large scale, and it was quite a reckoning and a wonder the way it increased. Besides, Inger brought clothing and some trifles of her own: a mirror, a string of pretty glass beads, carding combs, and a spinning wheel. Why, if she went on like that, the hut would soon be crammed from floor to ceiling and could no longer hold everything! Isak was naturally moved by all these earthly goods, but being habitually reticent he had difficulty expressing himself; he lumbered out onto the door slab to look at the weather and lumbered in again. He had been very lucky, yes indeed, and he felt more and more in love, drawn toward her, or whatever it might be called.

"You mustn't bother with so many things!" he said. "I have still more someplace. And then I have my maternal uncle, Sivert, have you heard of him?"—"No."—"Well, he's a rich man. He's the township treasurer."

Love makes the wise foolish—he tried to show himself agreeable in his fashion and overdid it. "What I was going to say," he remarked, "you don't have to hill the potatoes. I'll do it when I get home tonight."

With that he picked up his ax and went off to the woods.

She heard him chopping in the woods, it wasn't far away; she could tell by the crash that he was felling large trees. After listening a while, she went out into the field and began to hill the potatoes. Love makes the foolish wise.

He came home in the evening, hauling a huge log by a rope. Oh, that Isak, ever so simple and crass! He made as much noise as he could with the log, hawking and coughing so she would come out and be more than a little astounded at him.

And, sure enough, when she came she said, "You must be crazy! Why, you are a human being, aren't you?" she said. The man didn't answer. Wouldn't occur to him. To be a little more than a human being when dealing with a log was hardly worth talking about.<sup>2</sup> "And what are you going to do with that log?" she asked. "Oh, I don't quite know," he replied, playing coy.

But then he noticed that she had already hilled the potatoes, and that made her almost as good a worker as he. It wasn't to his liking, and he untied the rope from the log and walked off with it. "Are you going back?" she asked. "Yes," he replied angrily.

He brought another log, but didn't huff or make a noise; he just pulled it up to the hut like an ox and left it there.

In the course of the summer he hauled many logs to the hut.

## II

One day Inger again put some food in her calfskin bag and said, "I'm going for a short visit to my folks again."—"Oh," Isak said. "Yes, I must have a little talk with them."

Isak didn't see her off right away, but lingered quite a while. When he finally lumbered out on the door slab without showing any curiosity or misgivings, Inger was disappearing at the edge of the forest. "Hm. Will you be coming back?" he called out, unable to forbear. "Why shouldn't I come back!" she replied. "You must be joking!"—"Hm."

Then he was alone again—"oh Lord!" With his capacity and zest for work he couldn't just walk in and out of the hut and be in his own way, so he started doing something—clearing timber and hewing the logs flat on two sides. He worked hard till evening, then milked the goats and went to bed.

Quiet and empty in the hut, the turf walls and dirt floor giving off a heavy silence; he was deeply and somberly alone. But the spinning wheel and the carding combs were in place, and the beads on the string were kept securely in a little bag under the roof; Inger hadn't taken anything with her. But Isak was so hopelessly simple-minded that he felt afraid of the dark on a white summer night and saw all sorts of things sneak past the window. When, going by the light, it could be around two in the morning, he decided he might as well get up again and have breakfast, a huge bowl of porridge for the whole day, so he wouldn't have to waste time with a new cooking. He turned up virgin soil till evening, an addition to the potato field.

He took turns clearing timber and turning up soil for three days—tomorrow Inger would be likely to come. The least he could do was to have some fish for her when she came, so he decided not to take the shortcut and go straight up the mountain to meet her, but to make a detour to the fishing lake. He came to unknown parts of the mountain which had gray rocks and brown rocks, and little stones so heavy that they could be lead or copper. The brown stones could have many things in them, perhaps both gold and silver for all he knew, and he didn't much care. Once he got to the lake, the fish were biting well in the gnat-filled air at night, and he again came away with a load of char and trout—Inger would be all eyes! While returning home in the morning by the same roundabout way he had come, it occurred to him to take along a few of those heavy little stones from the mountain; they were brown, with dark-blue spots here and there, and felt real heavy.

Inger hadn't come, nor did she come. By now it was the fourth day. He milked the goats, as he had done when he was alone with them and had nobody else to do it, and then went up to a quarry and carried to the yard big piles of suitable stones for a wall. There were ever so many things to be done.

The fifth evening he went to bed with a touch of suspicion in his heart, but there were, of course, the spinning wheel and the carding combs, and there were the beads. The same emptiness in the hut and never a sound; the hours were long, and when at last he heard a sort of tramping outside, he thought it was something he merely imagined. "Oh, good Lord!" he said in his forlornness, and Isak didn't utter such words unless he meant them. But now he heard the tramping once more, and a little later he saw something glide past the window, whatever it could be, something with horns, very lifelike. He jumped to his feet and rushed out on the door slab, where he had a vision. "God or the devil!" he muttered, and Isak didn't say such things unless he just had to. He saw a cow, Inger and a cow, disappearing into the cowshed.

If he hadn't stood there and heard Inger talking to the cow in the shed, he wouldn't have trusted himself, but there he stood. At that moment he had a premonition: God bless her, she was a hell of a woman, without her equal anywhere, of course, but overmuch was overmuch. The spinning wheel and the carding combs, all right, and the beads, though suspiciously fine, were all right too! But a cow, perhaps picked up on a trail or in a pasture, would be missed by the owner and found.

Inger stepped out of the cowshed and said, chuckling with pride, "I just brought my cow!"—"Oh," he replied. "It took so long because I couldn't walk her harder over the mountain. She's with calf."—"You brought a cow?" he said. "Yes," she said, nearly bursting with earthly riches. "Or do you think I'm joking?" she said. Isak feared the worst, but kept himself in check and simply said, "Come in and get something to eat."

"Did you see the cow? Wasn't she pretty?"—"None like it. Where did you get her?" he asked as indifferently as he could. "She's called Goldenhorn. You've put up a wall here, what's that for? You'll work yourself to death, you will. But come and look at the cow, won't you!"

They went, Isak in his underclothes, not that it mattered. They looked the cow over with infinite care and noted all the markings: the head, the udder, the hindquarters, the flanks; red and white, easy on the feed.

Isak asked cautiously, "How old do you think she is?"—"Think?" Inger said. "She's exactly a tiny bit into her fourth year. I reared her myself, and everyone said it was the sweetest calf they'd ever seen. Will we have feed for her, you think?" Isak was beginning to believe whatever he pleased and declared, "As far as feed is concerned, there will be feed enough for her!"

Then they went in, ate and drank, and went to bed. They lay talking about the cow, about the great event, for quite a while. "But isn't she a pretty cow? She's going to have her second calf. Her name is Goldenhorn. Are you asleep, Isak?"—"No."—"And, do you know, she recognized me right away and followed me like a lamb yesterday. We lay up in the mountain a while last night."—

“Oh.”—“We’ll have to tether her through the summer, or she’ll run off; a cow is a cow.”—“Where has she been before?” Isak asked at last. “With my folks, they had her. They didn’t want to lose her, and the kids cried when I went off with her.”

Was it possible that Inger could come up with such a delicious lie? When she said that the cow was hers, she was obviously telling the truth. The premises were getting to be quite grand now, the farmstead a fit place to live in, there was scarcely anything lacking! Oh, that Inger—he loved her, and she loved him in return; they were frugal folk, living in the age of the wooden spoon and doing well. Let’s go to sleep, they thought. And they went to sleep. In the morning they woke up to another day, with this and that to contend with once more; quite so, joy and struggle like always in life.

There were these logs, for example—should he try to lay them up? With that in mind, Isak had kept his eyes open when he was in the village and had figured out the building method; he could cut a notched corner. And didn’t he simply have to do so? The farm had got sheep, a cow, the goats had become many, with more to come, the livestock were crowding their section of the hut, so he had to find a way out. He had better get started right away, while the potato plants were in bloom and the haying hadn’t yet begun. Inger would have to lend a hand now and then.

In the night, Isak awakes and gets out of bed, while Inger is sleeping like a log after her trek. He again walks over to the cowshed. Although he doesn’t address the cow in any way verging on fulsome flattery, he does pat her nicely and examines her afresh in every respect, in case she should have a brand indicating a strange owner. He finds no brand and comes away relieved.

There lies the timber. He starts to roll it, to lift it onto the wall in a square, in a large square for the main room and a small square for the bedroom. It was mighty interesting work, it absorbed him so utterly that he forgot what time it was. Now smoke was rising from the roof-hole of the hut, and Inger came and called him in for breakfast. “And what are you busy with now?” she said. “Are you up already?” Isak answered.

Oh, that Isak with all his secrets; but he was probably very pleased when she asked questions, was curious and made a fuss over his doings. When he had eaten, he lingered a bit longer than necessary in the hut before going out again. What was he waiting for?

“Huh, what am I doing sitting here!” he said, getting up. “With so much to do!” he said. “Are you building a house?” she asked. “Why don’t you answer me?” His answer was a favor—after all, being both a builder and his own boss, he was a real big shot, and so he answered, “You can see I’m building, can’t you?”—“Well, yes.”—“Can I get out of it?” Isak said. “Here you come bringing a whole cow in tow, and she must have a cowshed, mustn’t she?”

Poor Inger, she wasn’t as frightfully wise as he, as Isak, the lord of creation, was. This happened before she got to know him, before she understood his manner of speaking. “You aren’t building a cow barn, are you?” Inger said. “No?” he said. “You must be joking? It would be much better if you built a house.”—“You think so?” he said, looking at her with a faked expression of emptiness in his face, as though he was struck by her idea. “Yes. Then the animals would have the hut.” He thought it over. “I really believe that would be the best.”—“There you see,” said a triumphant Inger, “I wasn’t that far off the track, was I?”—“No. And how about a bedroom to go with the house?”—“A bedroom? Then it would be the way other folks have it. Yes, imagine if it could happen to us!”

It did happen to them. Isak built, cutting notched corners and laying his rounds of logs, and made a fireplace of suitable stones at the same time. This latter job was the least successful, and at times Isak was dissatisfied with himself. When the haying began, he had to get down from his building site and scour the hillsides, cutting grass and then carrying the hay home in huge loads. One rainy day Isak said he had to go to the village. “What are you going there for?”—“Oh, I don’t know exactly.”

He left and, after being away for two days, came back carrying a cooking stove—the barge came pitching through the forest with a range on his back. “Why don’t you treat yourself like a human being!” Inger said. But Isak simply tore down the fireplace, which looked so bad in the new house, and replaced it with the cooking stove. “Not everyone has a cooking stove,” Inger said. “What a wonderful thing for us!” she said.

The haying continued. Isak brought in masses of hay, for woodland grass is not the same as meadow grass unfortunately, but much poorer. So it was only on rainy days that he could work on the house and it went slowly; as late as August, when all the hay had been gathered and stowed away under the crag, the new house was only half done. In September Isak said, “This won’t do, I think you’ll have to run down to the village and find a man to help me,” he said to Inger. Inger had been a little worn-down lately and couldn’t run anymore, but of course she made ready to leave.

But then Isak had second thoughts, once again becoming prideful and wanting to do everything by himself. “It’s too little to bother other folks with,” he said, “I can manage alone.”—“You won’t stick it out.”—“Just help me get these logs up.”

When October came Inger declared, “I can’t anymore!” Which was a great pity: the rafters had to be put up so that the house could be roofed before the fall rains, it was high time. What was wrong with Inger? She wasn’t getting sick, was she? She made a goat cheese now and then, but otherwise she was mostly just good for moving the tethered Goldenhorn several times a day. “Bring me a large basket or box or the like the next time you go to the village,” Inger had said. “What do you want that for?” Isak asked. “I need it,” she said.

He hoisted the rafters with a rope, Inger meanwhile pushing with one hand; her mere presence seemed to help. The work went forward little by little; the roof wasn’t very high, but the beams were incredibly big and strong for such a small house.

The good fall weather held up fairly well; Inger dug up the potatoes by herself and Isak put the roof in place before the rains started in earnest. The goats had already been moved into the hut for the night, joining the people; it worked that way too, everything

worked, the people didn't whine about it. Isak again got ready to go down to the village. "Maybe you could bring back a large basket or box for me," Inger said again, by way of a humble wish. "I've ordered some glass windows that I have to pick up," Isak replied, "and I've ordered two painted doors," he replied, acting superior. "Oh, well, forget about the basket then."—"What do you want it for?"—"What I want it for? Don't you have a pair of eyes in your head!"

Isak went off, absorbed in thought, and returned in two days with a window and a door to the main room and a door to the side room, and besides, hanging on his chest, he had the box for Inger, with various food items in it. "I'm afraid you'll carry yourself to death some day!" Inger said. "Ho, to death?" He was so infinitely far from being about to die that he took a medicine bottle with naphtha from his pocket and gave it to Inger, ordering her to use plenty of it so she would get better. And there were the windows and the painted doors which he could still preen himself on; he immediately set about putting them in. Oh, such small doors, used to boot, but painted up all neat again in white and red, they were as decorative as paintings in their home.

And now they moved into the new building, and the animals were dispersed all over the hut; a ewe with a lamb was left with the cow so she wouldn't feel lonesome.

The folks in the wilderness had come a long way, a miraculously long way.

### III

As long as the ground was frostfree, Isak dug up rocks and roots in the field and leveled off his meadow for the next year, and when the ground froze he went into the woods and cut heaps of cordwood. "What's all that wood for?" Inger would ask. "Oh, I don't quite know," Isak replied, but he knew well enough. Here the virgin forest, old and thick, was right next to the house, blocking any extension of the hayfield; besides, he intended to have the cordwood taken down to the village somehow or other during the winter, to be sold to those without any. Isak felt confident that it made good sense, and so he worked hard clearing woodland and cutting up trees into cordwood. Inger often came by as he worked, and although he acted as if he didn't care and it wasn't at all necessary, she understood that she was doing him a kindness that way. They would exchange some strange words at times. "Have you got nothing better to do than come here and freeze to death?" Isak said. "I'm not cold," Inger replied, "but you are ruining your health with work," she said. "Put on my jacket lying there!"—"That would all be very well, but how can I be sitting here when Goldenhorn is about to calve!"—"Oh, Goldenhorn is about to calve?"—"Didn't you hear what I said? Shall we raise the calf, you think?"—"I don't know, do as you like."—"We can't eat the calf, can we? Because then we'll only have one lone cow."—"I can never believe you want to eat the calf," Isak said.

Two lonely people, ill-favored and all too lusty, but a boon to each other, to the animals and to the earth!

Goldenhorn calved. An important day in the wilderness, a blessing and a great happiness. Goldenhorn was given a good meal drink, and though Isak had carried the meal home on his back, he said, "Don't stint on the meal!" And there lay a fine calf, a beauty of a she-calf, red-flanked like its mother and amusingly bewildered after the miracle it had passed through. In a couple of years it would itself be a mother. "That calf will become an awfully handsome cow," Inger said, "but I don't know what to call her," she said. Inger was childish and poorly gifted in every way. "Call her?" Isak said. "You can never find a more suitable name for her than Silverhorn."

The first snow fell. As soon as the condition of the roads allowed, Isak went to the village; mysterious as usual, he refused to explain his errand to Inger. He came back—the surprise couldn't have been greater—with a horse and sledge! "You must be joking!" Inger said; "you haven't stolen the horse, have you?"—"Have I stolen the horse!"—"Found him, I mean?" Oh, if only Isak could now have said, "My horse, our horse!" But he had only borrowed the horse for a while, so he could use it to transport his firewood.

Isak drove cordwood to the village and brought back food and flour and herring. And one day he arrived with a one-year-old bullock on the sledge; he had paid such an absurdly low price for it, because there was beginning to be a dearth of fodder in the hamlet. It was lean and shaggy and didn't have much of a voice for bellowing, but it was no freak and would improve if tended well. The bullock was capable of covering. "You bring home everything!" Inger said.

Yes, Isak brought home everything, planks and boards he had got in exchange for logs, a grindstone, waffle iron, and implements, all in exchange for the cordwood. Inger swelled with riches and said each time, "Are you bringing still more things? Now we have a bullock and everything a body can think of." And one day Isak replied, "Come to that, I don't aim to bring any more."

They had enough for a long time and were well off. What would Isak embark upon come spring? He had tramped after his load of wood hundreds of times last winter and figured it out: he would clear more ground along the hillside, strip it bare, cut up wood and let it dry over the summer, and haul double loads on next winter's snow. His reckoning was without a flaw. Also, Isak had thought about something else hundreds of times: about Goldenhorn, where she came from, who owned her. There was never a wife like Inger, oh, a wild thing she was; and she wanted whatever it pleased him to do with her and was content. But one day someone might come and take Goldenhorn back and lead her away by a rope. And more trouble could follow. "You haven't stolen the horse, have you?" Inger said, "or found him," she said. That was her first thought, she probably couldn't be trusted, so what should he do? This was what he had been thinking about. Hadn't he even gotten a mate for Goldenhorn, for a stolen cow, maybe!

And now he had to return the horse. It was a pity, for the horse was small and chubby and they had come to love it. "Well, you've already accomplished a lot," Inger said comfortingly. "It's now that spring is coming I should've had the horse," Isak replied, "I badly need him."

In the morning he drove off quietly with the last load of wood and was away for two days. When he came lumbering home on foot the third day, he heard a curious sound, whatever it could be, as he neared the house and stopped for a moment. A child crying—good Lord! Well, there was no help for it, but it was awe-some and strange, and Inger hadn't said a word.

As he stepped inside, the first thing he saw was the box, that famous box he had carried home on his chest; it was now hanging by two cords from the ridgepole and was a cradle and a swing for the child. Inger was not only up, shuffling about half dressed, but, to tell the truth, she had even milked the cow and the goats.

When the child stopped crying, Isak asked, "It's over already?"—"Yes, it's over."—"Hm."—"I was just stretching to hang up the box, so that everything was ready, but it was too much for me, and afterwards I felt unwell."—"Why didn't you warn me?"—"How could I know so exactly when it would come? It's a boy."—"Oh, it's a boy."—"If only I could know or figure out what to call him!" Inger said.

Isak was shown the little red face; it was well-formed, with no harelip, and with thick hair on its head. A fine little fellow, considering his status and position in a box. Isak felt curiously weak, the water troll was standing before a miracle; conceived in a



sacred fog, it appeared in life with a little face, like an allegory. The days and the years would turn the miracle into a human being.

"Come and get something to eat," Inger said. . . .

Isak clears forest and cuts wood. He has made headway, having a saw; with sawing, the wood piles grow huge—he makes a street out of them, a town. Inger is more tied down to the house now and cannot watch her husband at work; instead Isak makes brief visits home. Funny how such a little fellow in a box made you feel! It wouldn't occur to Isak to pay any attention to him; anyway, it was only a worm, let it just lie there! But you were a human being, after all, and couldn't listen coldly when it cried, oh, such a wee little cry.

"Don't touch him!" Inger says, "you're sure to have resin on your hands," she says. "I have resin on my hands? You're crazy!" Isak answers. "I haven't had resin on my hands since I put up this house. Hand over the boy and I'll dandle him!"—"No, he'll soon quiet down."

In May a strange woman comes over the mountain to the lonely homestead, she is a remote relative of Inger's and is well received. "I just wanted to see how Goldenhorn is doing since she left us," she says. "People don't much care to know how you're doing, little one," Inger whimpers to the child. "Oh he, anyone can tell how he's doing. He's quite a fellow, I can see. Who could have imagined a year ago that I would find you here, Inger, with a husband and child and a house and wherewithal!"—"You can forget about me. But there sits someone who took me as I was!"—"Are you wed? Oh, you aren't wed yet."—"We'll see what we can do when this here fellow is to be christened," Inger says. "We should've been wed, but we haven't gotten around to it. What do you say, Isak?"—"Wed, surely, that's clear."—"Couldn't you, Oline, come back between the work seasons and stay with the animals while we make the trip?" Inger asks. "Oh, sure," the visitor promised. "You'll not be doing it for nothing." Well, she knew that. . . . "And now you've started building again, I see. What is it going to be? Haven't you got enough?" Inger sees her chance and says, "You ask him, he won't tell me."—"What I'm building," Isak answers, "isn't worth mentioning. A small shed if I should happen to need it. But what about Goldenhorn, didn't you say you wanted to see her?" he asks the visitor.

They walk over to the cowshed, the cow and the calf are displayed, along with the bullock, a real chunky fellow; the visitor nods approvingly at the animals, at the cowshed itself, of the finest quality, and at the great cleanliness, out of this world. "I'd bet on Inger in everything that has to do with good earthly care of animals!" the woman says.

"So Goldenhorn was at your place before, was she?" Isak asks. "From the beginning! Well, not exactly my place, but my son's, which comes to the same thing. Her mother is still there, in her stall."

Isak hadn't heard more joyful tidings in a long time and was eased of a burden; Goldenhorn was now rightly Inger's and his cow. To tell the truth, he had almost considered the grievous step of slaughtering Goldenhorn in the fall to get rid of his uncertainty, scraping the hide and burying the horns, thus erasing every trace of the cow Goldenhorn in this life. Now this was no longer necessary. He grew so proud of Inger that he said, "Cleanly, sure. You won't find her match, or peer, anywhere! This place was only so-and-so until I got a woman of my own."—"What else could you expect!" Oline said.

This woman from the other side of the mountain, a wise, good-natured person of refined speech called Oline, lingered for a few days, sleeping in the side room. Before she set out for home, she had gotten some wool from Inger's sheep; she hid the bundle from Isak for some reason or other.

And now the world, that of the child, Isak and his wife, was the same once more: daily chores, small and big joys; Goldenhorn milked well, the goats had kidded and milked well, and Inger was already making a row of white and red cheeses and putting them away for ripening. She had a plan to make so many cheeses that she could buy herself a loom for them—oh, that Inger, she knew how to weave!

And Isak was building his shed; he, too, had a plan, no doubt. He put together the addition to the hut with double paneling, made a doorway in it and a nice little window with four panes; then he laid on a roof of waste slabs, waiting with the birch bark until the ground thawed so he could get sod. Nothing beyond what was necessary and useful, no floor, no planed walls; but Isak built a stall, as if for a horse, and made a manger.

It was now late May. The sun had thawed the hills, and Isak covered his shed with sod and finished it. Then one morning he ate a meal to last for the day, took some more food with him, shouldered pick and spade and went down to the village. "Could you get me four ells of calico?" Inger called after him. "What do you want with that?" Isak replied.

It seemed as if he would be gone for good. Inger looked at the weather every day, noting the direction of the wind, as though she were expecting a sailing ship; she went out at night and listened, even thought of taking the child on her arm and going after him. Then at last he came back with a horse and cart. Before the door Isak gave a loud "Whoa!" And though the horse was gentle and quiet and neighed on recognizing the hut, Isak called out so as to be heard inside, "Can you come and hold the horse a minute?"

Out comes Inger. "What's up?" she said. "Oh, Isak, you've borrowed him again! Where have you been all this time? Gone five days and some."—"Where should I've been? I had to make a road many places to drive through with my cart. Hold the horse a bit, I told you!"—"Your cart? Why, you haven't bought the cart, have you?"

Isak silent, Isak swelling with silence. He starts unloading the plow and the harrow he has gotten for himself, nails, food, a pry, a sack of grain. "How is the child doing?" he asks.

“Don’t worry about the child. Have you bought the cart? I’m asking. For I keep stinting myself for a loom,” she said jestingly, she was so glad he was back home again.

Isak, taken up with his own things, was silent again for a long while, looking around and trying to figure out where to put all his merchandise and implements; it was anything but easy to find room for it all on the farm. But when Inger gave up asking questions and instead began to chat with the horse, Isak broke his silence. “Have you ever seen a farm without a horse and cart, plow and harrow, and all the rest of it? And if you want to know, I’ve bought both the horse and the cart and everything in it,” he answered. Inger could only shake her head and say, “You’re really somebody!”

And now Isak was no longer small and dispirited, it was as though he had paid like a lord for Goldenhorn: Here you are—the round sum of a horse for my part! He was so buoyant that he grabbed the plow once more, moved it and carried it with one hand over to the house and stood it up against the wall. He knew how to manage things all right! And afterwards he picked up the harrow, the pry, and a new manure fork he had bought, all those priceless agricultural implements, the treasures of the new homestead. The equipment was complete, nothing lacking, splendid!

“Hm. And we’ll find a way to get a loom,” he said, “if my health holds up. There’s your calico, blue, the only color they had.”

He was overflowing with things and kept pouring them out. It was as though he had been to the city.

“Too bad that Oline didn’t get to see all this while she was here,” Inger says.

Sheer tomfoolery and vanity on her part, and Isak snorted at her words. But he probably wouldn’t have minded if Oline had seen their splendor.

The child cried.

“Go back in to the boy,” Isak said. “The horse has quieted down.”

He unhitches the horse and takes it to the stable—he stabled his own horse! He feeds and pats it, treating it lovingly. What he owed for horse and cart? Everything, the whole sum, a mighty debt; but it would all be paid by the end of the summer. He had cordwood to pay with, a bit of building-bark from last year, as well as some good-sized logs. There was no need to worry. Later, after his excitement and pridefulness simmered down, he had many a bitter moment of worry and fear; now everything depended on the summer and fall, the harvest!

The days were taken up with work on the soil, ever more work; he cleared new parcels of roots and rocks, plowed, manured, harrowed, chopped, and crumbled lumps of dirt with his hands and heels—always and everywhere the tiller of the soil who turned the fields into velvet carpets. He waited a few days, until it looked like rain, then he sowed the grain.

His forefathers had probably sowed grain for several hundred years; it was a solemn act on a mild, quiet evening with no wind, preferably before a merciful light drizzle and as soon as possible after the graylags migrated north. The potatoes were a new fruit, there was nothing mystical about them, nothing religious, women and children could join in the planting; these earth apples that came from foreign lands, like coffee, were great and delicious food, but akin to turnips. Grain was bread, grain or no grain meant life or death. Isak walked bareheaded, sowing in Jesus’ name; he looked like a tree stump with hands, but in his head he was like a child. Each broadcast was made with loving care, he was kindly and resigned. And now these seeds will sprout and turn into ears and more grain, which happens all over the earth when grain is sown. In Palestine, in America, in the Gudbrandsdal Valley, in the whole wide world, and the tiny little square where Isak went sowing was at the center of everything. Fans of grain radiated from his hand, the sky was overcast and kind, promising an ever so light drizzle.

## IV

Between the work seasons came many days, but Oline did not come.

Being free from work on the soil, Isak got ready for the haying with two scythes and two rakes, made a long bottom for the cart so he could haul hay on it, and got himself runners and roughcast lumber to make a sledge for the winter. He did many useful things. And as for the two shelves on the living-room wall, he also put up those, so they could keep various things there, both the almanac he had finally bought and stirring sticks and ladles not in use. Inger said that those two shelves were a great blessing.

Inger thought that all things were great blessings. Like Goldenhorn, for one, who didn't try to run away anymore, but settled down with the calf and the bullock and roamed the woods the livelong day. Or the goats, which were thriving, their heavy udders nearly dragging on the ground. Inger sewed a long garment of blue calico and a little cap of the same material; this was the christening robe, as pretty as could be. The boy himself followed the work with his eyes now and then, he was a wonder of a boy already; and if she insisted on calling him Eleseus, Isak wouldn't set himself against it any longer. When the robe was finished it had a long train, two ells of calico, and each ell had cost a lot of money, but there was no help for it: the child was their firstborn. "If your string of beads is ever to be used, now is the time!" Isak said. Oh, but Inger had already thought of them, of the beads, she wasn't a mother for nothing, but utterly foolish and proud. The string wasn't long enough to go around the boy's neck, but the beads would be pretty on the front of his cap, and that is where she put them.

But Oline didn't come.

If it hadn't been for the animals, they could all have left the place together and come back in three to four days with the child christened. And if it hadn't been for that confounded wedding, Inger could have gone alone. "Unless we could postpone the wedding for the present?" Isak said. "It will take ten or twelve years before Eleseus can stay home and do the milking," Inger replied.

So Isak had to be sensible. Actually, the whole thing had begun without a beginning, and for all he knew the wedding ceremony might be just as necessary as the christening. And now there were signs of a coming drought, a really nasty drought; if it didn't rain fairly soon, the crops would burn up. But everything was in God's hand. Isak made ready to go down to the village and find someone to come. Again, many, many miles to run!

All that trouble for a wedding and a christening! Folks in the back country have indeed many worries, great and small!

Then Oline came. . . .

And now they were married and the child christened, everything in order; they had even made sure to be wed first, so the child would be legitimate. But the drought continued, and now the little grain fields, those velvet carpets, were burning up—and why? It was all in God's hand. Isak mowed his bits of meadow, but although they had been manured in the spring, the grass was scanty; he mowed and mowed on the hillsides, in remote outlying areas, and never tired of mowing and drying and bringing fodder home, for he had a horse already and a large herd. By mid-July he also had to cut the grain for green forage, it was no good for anything else. So now everything depended on the potatoes.

What were potatoes anyway? Were they nothing but a kind of coffee from foreign parts that could be dispensed with? Oh, the potato is a fruit like no other, standing up in drought, standing up in rain, and always growing. It defies the weather and puts up with a lot; if it is fairly well treated, it will yield a fifteenfold return. True, the potato lacks the blood of the grape, but it does have the flesh of the chestnut, and it can be roasted or boiled and be used for everything. A man can be without bread, but if he has potatoes he is not without food. The potato can be roasted in the embers and be one's supper, it can be boiled in water and be one's breakfast. What does it require of meat or fish? Very little; the potato is easily satisfied, a bowl of milk or a herring will do. The wealthy use butter with it, the poor dip it in a bit of salt on a saucer; on Sundays Isak would sometimes wash it down with heavy cream from Goldenhorn's milk. Oh, that despised potato, forever blessed!

But now the prospects looked bleak for the potato crop, too.

Isak looked at the sky countless times every day. The sky was blue. Many an evening it looked like a shower was coming. Isak would go in and say, "I wonder if we won't be getting that rain, after all." A couple of hours later all hope was gone.

The drought had now lasted for seven weeks, with extreme heat, and during all that time the potatoes were in full bloom, unnatural but marvelous. At a distance the potato patches looked like snow fields. When would it all end? The almanac gave no hint, the almanacs nowadays were not like before, they were good for nothing. Now it looked like rain again, and Isak went inside and said to Inger, "I bet it will rain tonight, God willing!"—"Does it look that way?"—"Yes. And the horse is shaking in his shafts." Inger opened the door a crack and said, "Yes, here it comes!" A few drops fell. The hours passed, they went to bed, and when Isak went out in the night to look, the sky was blue. "Good Lord, no!" Inger said. "Anyway, now those last leaves you gathered will be dry by tomorrow," she said, comforting him as best she could.

Oh yes, Isak had also worked hard at gathering leaves and had lots on hand by now, of the best quality. It was valuable fodder, and he treated it like hay, covering it with birch bark in the woods. Only a small remainder was still left ungarnered, causing him, in his despair, to answer Inger with indifference, "I won't bring it in even if it's dry!"—"You must be joking," Inger said.

And the next day, sure enough, he didn't bring it in, since he had said so, no, he didn't bring in the leaves. They could just stay there, it wouldn't rain anyway, just let the leaves stay there, in God's name! He could bring them in sometime before Christmas, if the sun hadn't burned them all up by that time!

That showed how bitterly insulted he felt; it was no longer wonderful to sit on the doorstep and look down the field and be the owner of it all. The potato patches down there were in a flowering frenzy and drying up, so let the leaves remain where they were, just help yourself! Oh, that Isak—maybe there was a sly little thought behind it for all his dense naiveté, maybe he did it on spec, trying to provoke the blue sky at the change of the moon.

In the evening it again looked like rain. "You should've brought in your leaves," Inger said. "Why?" Isak asked, acting very much out of it. "Ah, you're joking, but it might rain, you know."—"There won't be any rain this year, you can see that, can't you?"

All the same, at night it was as though the window turned dark, and it also looked as if something beat against it and made it wet, whatever it might be. Waking up, Inger said, "It's raining, look at the window!" Isak merely snorted and answered, "Rain? It's not rain. I have no idea what you're talking about."—"Stop kidding, will you!" Inger said.

Isak was kidding, all right. But he only fooled himself. Of course it was rain, a heavy shower at that, but after giving Isak's leaves a good soaking, it stopped. The sky was blue. "That's just what I said, that it wouldn't rain," Isak said, stiff-necked and more than a little wicked.

The shower did nothing for the potatoes, and days came and went; the sky was blue. Then Isak set to work on his sledge; softening his heart, he took pains with it, planing runners and shafts and being humble—oh, Lord! And the days came and went, the child grew, Inger churned and made cheese; they suffered no actual want despite the crop failure, which would never be the death of able back-country folk. And besides, after nine weeks they were blessed with a heavy rain, a whole day and night of rain; for sixteen hours it poured, the windows of heaven were opened. If it had been like that two weeks ago, Isak would have said, "It's too late." Now he said to Inger, "It looks like some of the potatoes will be saved."—"Oh, certainly," Inger replied comfortingly, "it will all be saved."

Now things began to look up; there were showers every day, the aftermath greened, it was like magic. The potato plants were flowering, they were indeed, worse than ever, with big berries coming out at the top, which was far from right; but no one knew what was under the roots, Isak hadn't dared check. Then one day Inger had found over twenty small potatoes under one plant. "And they have five more weeks to grow in," Inger said. Oh, that Inger, always trying to comfort and speak hopefully despite her harelip. But her speech was truly terrible, she hissed, like a vent leaking steam; but her comfort was welcome in the wilds. And she was endowed with a great zest for life. "Maybe you could make one more bed," she said to Isak. "Oh," he said. "Well, there's no hurry, but . . ."

They started digging the potatoes, finishing by Michaelmas, as was the time-honored custom. It was an average year, a good year; once again it turned out that potatoes weren't terribly particular about the weather, they grew anyway and put up with a lot. Naturally it wasn't quite an average or good year if they reckoned strictly, but they couldn't reckon strictly this year; a Lapp who had passed by one day wondered about all the potatoes in the new homestead, it was far worse in the surrounding hamlets, he said.

Then Isak had again a few weeks for turning up new soil before the frost set in. The cattle were now grazing near the house, wherever they pleased, and it was pleasant for Isak to have them around as he worked and to listen to the bells; it did slow him down somewhat, naturally, for the bullock had a way of doing mischief butting at the stacks of leaves, and the goats were high and low and everywhere, even on the roof of the hut.

Troubles great and small.

One day Isak hears a yell. Inger stands on the door slab with the child on her arm, pointing down at the bull and Silverhorn, the nice little cow, acting like sweethearts. Isak throws down his pick and rushes down; but it was probably too late, the damage had been done. Oh, the slut, getting an early start, only a year old, half a year too soon, the slut, a mere child! Isak gets her into the hut, but it is no doubt too late. "Oh well," Inger said, "in a way it's good, for otherwise both cows would be calving in the fall." Oh, that Inger, she didn't have a very good head on her shoulders, but she may have known what she did when she let Silverhorn and the bullock out together this morning.

The winter came, Inger carded and spun, Isak carted wood, huge loads of dry wood on good roads; all debts and obligations were erased, horse and cart, plow and harrow were his. He drove off with Inger's good cheeses and brought back twist yarn, a loom, yarn reel and warp beam; he brought flour and food, planks, boards and nails. One day he came back with a lamp. "As sure as I'm here, you must be joking!" Inger said, but she had long understood that the lamp would be coming. They lighted it the same evening and were in paradise; little Eleseus seemed to think it was the sun. "Look how surprised he is!" Isak said. From now on Inger could spin by lamplight.

He brought linen for shirts and new reindeer hide boots for Inger. She had asked him for various dyestuffs for woolen yarns, and those he also brought. But one day he came home with a clock. With what? A clock! Then Inger was thunderstruck, unable to utter a word for quite a while. Isak hung the clock on the wall with cautious hands and set it by rule of thumb; he pulled up the weights and made it strike. The boy turned his eyes toward the deep sound and then looked at his mother. "You certainly may wonder," she said, taking him on her lap, herself moved. Of all the good things here in the solitude, nothing could match a wall clock that went all through the dark winter, striking the hours prettily.

Then the wood had been carted off and Isak began cutting more wood in the forest, making his streets and his town of cordwood for next winter. He was getting farther and farther away from the houses now; with already a broad stretch of hillside open for tillage,

he decided not to do any more clear-cutting but from now on to fell only the oldest trees with a dry top.

He had long understood, of course, why Inger had dropped a word about one more bed, so now he had to hurry up and not put it off any longer. One dark evening when he came home from the forest it was already over: the family had increased, another boy. Inger was lying down. That Inger—only that morning she had tried to send him down to the village! “You should give the horse a workout again,” she said, “he just stands there in his stall scraping the ground.”—“I don’t have time for such nonsense,” Isak said and left. Now he understood that she had only wanted to get him out of the way. And why? It might have been good to have him around the house. “How come you never let me know?” he said. “Now you must make a bed for yourself and sleep in the side room,” she said.

Making a bed wasn’t all, of course, bedding was also needed. They didn’t have two sheepskin blankets, nor would they be able to afford another such blanket until next fall, when they could butcher some rams; but even so a couple of ram’s skins wouldn’t make a blanket. Isak was miserable for quite some time, feeling cold at night; he tried to bury himself in the hay at the foot of the crag, to lie down with the cows, homeless as he was. Luckily it was already May, then June would come, July . . .

Strange how much had been accomplished in the wilds by now—a human dwelling, housing for the livestock, cultivated fields, all in three years. What was Isak building now? Another shed, a lean-to, an addition to the farmhouse. A thundering noise resounded through the building when he hammered in his eight-inch nails, and now and then Inger came out to beg mercy for the little ones. “The little ones, sure; talk to them for a while, sing for them, let Elseus have the bucket lid to bang with! These long nails won’t take me very long, this is exactly where they have to be, in the supporting beams, which will attach the whole extension to the house. Later there will only be boards and two-and-a-half-inch nails, like building dollhouses.”

Could his pounding be avoided? As of now, the herring barrel, the flour and other foodstuffs were kept in the stable, so as not to leave them out in the open, but the pork had come to taste of it, so the lean-to was a sheer necessity. Anyway, the little ones should be able to get used to a few hammer blows at the wall. Elseus had somehow become rather delicate and sickly, but the other one suckled like a pudgy cherub, and when he wasn’t crying he slept. A wonderful baby. Isak made no objection to his being called Sivert—maybe it was the best—though he had again thought of Jakob. Sometimes Inger was right. Elseus, a fine name to be sure, was the name of her pastor, whereas Sivert was the name of Inger’s maternal uncle, the township treasurer, a prosperous bachelor without heirs. So how could a child do better than be named after him?

Then came another spring planting, with everything in the ground before Whitsuntide. At the time when Inger had only Elseus, she couldn’t possibly spare time to help her husband, the firstborn kept her so busy; now that she had two children, she kept the yard clean and did much else besides: helping patiently with the potato planting, sowing carrots and turnips. Such a wife was anything but easy to find. Didn’t she also set a loom? Whenever she had a free moment, she would run into the side room and weave a few spools; it was to be a half-wool union fabric to make underclothes from for the winter. After she dyed her yarn, there was blue and red dress material for herself and the little ones; at the end she put in more colors and made a quilt cover for Isak from the fabric. All necessary and useful things, and so durable!

And now life was picking up for the back-country family, and if the crops were good the settlers were outright enviable. What remained to do? A hayloft, naturally, a barn with a threshing floor in the middle—that was a goal for the future, to be reached like the other goals, just wait! Now little Silverhorn had calved, the goats kidded and the sheep lambed, so that the pasture swarmed with sheep and goats. And what about the people? Elseus walked wherever he liked already, and little Sivert had been christened. Inger? She was apparently getting ready to have a child again, she was so buxom. What was yet another child to her? Oh, nothing—that is to say, a wonder, they were such pretty tots; she was proud of her children and intimated that God didn’t trust everybody with such big and handsome children. Inger was in full swing being young. With her disfigured face she had lived her entire youth like a pariah; though she could both dance and work, the boys didn’t notice her and turned away, rejecting her sweetness. Now her time had come to unfold, she was constantly in full bloom and with child. Isak himself, the master of the house, was and would always be a serious man, but he had made good progress and was content. What had enabled him to keep body and soul together before Inger came was very obscure, potatoes and goat milk, or maybe venturesome dishes without a name; now he had everything conceivable for a man in his circumstances.

Another drought came, another crop failure. Os-Anders, the Lapp, who came by with his dog, could report that folks in the hamlets around had already cut their grain for cattle feed. “Uh-huh, so they had no hope?” Inger asked. “No. But they have made a herring catch. Sivert, your uncle, will get a fishing fee!”—“He’s got a bit stacked away from before, both here and there.”—“Just like you, Inger.”—“Yes, thank God, we can’t complain. What are they saying about me at home?” Os-Anders wags his head and, making up to her, says he has no words for it. “If you would like a bowl of fresh milk, just let me know,” Inger says. “You shouldn’t go to any trouble. But maybe you have a little something for the dog?”

The milk came, food for the dog came. The Lapp heard some music from inside the front room and listened. “What’s that?”—“It’s our wall clock striking the hour,” Inger said, bursting with grandeur.

The Lapp again wagged his head and said, “You’ve got a house and a horse and wealth, can you name me something you don’t have?”—“Hm, we can never thank God enough.”—“Oline asked me to say hello.”—“Uh. How is she doing?”—“Tolerably well. Where’s your husband?”—“He’s clearing land somewhere.”—“They say he hasn’t bought the place,” he remarks casually. “Bought? Who says that?”—“People say.”—“Who should he buy it from? It’s a common.”—“Well, yes.”—“And working his land has cost him a lot of sweat.”—“They say the land belongs to the state.”

Inger didn't understand a thing and said, "Well, maybe so. Was it Oline who said this?"—"I can't recall who it was," the Lapp replied, casting shifty eyes in all directions.

Inger was surprised that he didn't beg for anything, Os-Anders always did, as do all Lapps, they beg. Os-Anders fills his stubby clay pipe and lights up. Oh, what a pipe—he smokes and puffs, making his wrinkled old face look like a rune. "Hm, there's no need to ask if the children are yours," he said, making up to her again. "They look so much like you. The spittin' image of yourself when you were small."

Inger, who was a freak and a horror, knew it was all wrong, of course, but she swelled with pride all the same. Even a Lapp can cheer a mother's heart. "If your bag wasn't so full, I'd give you a little something to put in it," she said. "Don't go to any trouble."

Inger goes inside with the child on her arm, and meanwhile Eleseus is left with the Lapp. They get along very well, the boy is shown something strange in the Lapp's bag, something furry, and gets to stroke it. The dog is whining and barking. When Inger comes out with the snack for the road, she gives a low moan and sits down on the doorstep. "What do you have in your bag?" she asks. "Oh, it's nothing. A hare."—"I could see that."—"The little fellow wanted to see him. The dog flushed him out today and killed him for me."—"Here's your food," Inger said.

## V

It was said in the old days that lean years came in twos, at a minimum, one after the other; Isak had grown patient and put up with his lot. The grain burned up and the hay harvest was fairly poor, but again it looked as though the potatoes would pull through; it was bad enough, but there was no want. Once again Isak had cordwood and timber to bring to the village, and since there had been herring catches all around the coast, people had plenty of money to buy wood for. It almost looked like an act of providence that the grain harvest had failed, for where should he have threshed his grain without a barn with a threshing floor? Just call it providence, there is no harm in that in the long run.

Another matter was that new things might come up and upset him. What, for instance, had a certain Lapp told Inger last summer—that he hadn't bought the place? Was he supposed to buy it, why? After all, the land lay there, the forest stood there, he tilled the soil and put up a home in the midst of primitive nature, fed his family and his animals, was in debt to nobody, worked and worked. He had several times thought of speaking to the sheriff when he was in the village, but it had been postponed; the sheriff didn't have a good reputation and Isak was a man of few words. What should he say if he went, what had he come for?

One day that winter the sheriff came driving out to the homestead with a man in tow and many papers in his briefcase—so there was Geissler, the sheriff himself, no less. Seeing the broad open hillside lying nice and smooth under the snow, he probably thought it was all cultivated land. "This, you know, is a big farm," he said, "you don't expect to get all this for nothing, do you?"

There it was! Isak was terror-stricken and didn't answer.

"You should have come to me and bought the land," the sheriff said. "Yes."

The sheriff spoke about assessment, about boundaries, and taxes, royal taxes, he said, and when it was explained to Isak, he found it less and less unreasonable. The sheriff teased his companion and said, "All right, assessor, what's the size of the tillage?" But he didn't wait for an answer, just wrote down the tillage at random. He asked Isak about the hay, how many loads, and how many barrels of potatoes. And how would they go about the question of boundaries? They couldn't pace off boundaries in the woods waist-deep in snow, but in the summer there was no way anyone could get up here. What did Isak himself have in mind as far as woodland and pasturage were concerned? Isak didn't know, till now he had considered as his all he could see. The sheriff said that the state set limits. "The greater area you get, the more it will cost," he said. "Oh."—"Yes. And you won't get all you can swallow, you'll get what you need."—"I see."

Inger put out some milk, the sheriff and his companion drank it, and she brought some more. That sheriff, was he really a hard man? For now he patted Elseus' hair and said, "Is he playing with stones? Let me see those stones. What is this? They are so heavy, there must be some kind of metal in them."—"There's plenty such up in the mountains," Isak said.

The sheriff returned to the business in hand. "It's the area to the south and west that's most valuable to you, isn't it?" he asked Isak. "Shall we say a mile and a half south?"—"As far as that?" the companion exclaimed. "You couldn't till even a few hundred feet," the sheriff said curtly. "How much would that cost?" Isak asked. "I don't know, nobody knows," the sheriff said. "But I'll propose a low price; you're miles off in the wilderness with no access."

"Yes, but a mile and a half!" the companion said again.

The sheriff wrote a mile and a half south and asked, "And up toward the mountains?"—"There I must have as far as the lake. It's a big lake," Isak replied.

The sheriff wrote. "And north?"—"It doesn't really matter," Isak said. "There's no real timber on the moors."

The sheriff wrote three quarters of a mile, using his own discretion. "To the east?"—"That doesn't matter either. There's nothing but the mountain over to Sweden."

The sheriff wrote.

After it was all written down, he made a quick estimate and said, "This will be a large property, of course, and if it had been anywhere near the village, nobody could've bought it. I'll propose one hundred dollars for it all. What do you think," he asked his companion. The latter replied, "But that's no price at all!"—"A hundred dollars!" Inger said. "Don't buy so much land, Isak."—"No," Isak said. The companion saw his chance: "That's what I'm saying! What are you going to do with it all?"

"Cultivate it," the sheriff said.

He had been sitting there writing patiently, with now and then a child crying in the room, and he probably was reluctant to rewrite the whole thing; as it was, he wouldn't be home until late in the night, or not before tomorrow morning. Without further ado, he put the papers in his briefcase. "Go and hitch up!" he told his companion. Turning to Isak, he declared, "As a matter of fact, you should've had the place for nothing, and payment to boot, the way you have worked. And I'll state that in my proposal. Then we'll see how much the state will ask for the title deed."

As for Isak, God only knows how he felt. He didn't seem to mind that his place, and the enormous work he had put in there, was being valued at a high price. As likely as not, he didn't consider it impossible to come up with a hundred dollars in the course of time,

and therefore he didn't say any more; he could work as before, till the earth and turn decaying timber into cordwood. Isak was not one of those who observed carefully, he didn't keep a lookout for fortuitous happenings, he worked.

Inger thanked the sheriff and asked him to be their spokesman with the state.

"Yes. But I don't decide anything, you know, I only write my opinion. How old is the smaller one?"—"A good six months."—"Boy or girl?"—"Boy."

Far from being a hard man, the sheriff was superficial and not very conscientious. He ignored his appraiser, Brede Olsen, the bailiff, arranging the important deal haphazardly; a big transaction, critical for Isak and his wife, and perhaps for countless generations of their descendants, was set down in writing at random: the sheriff only wrote. But he showed the settlers great kindness, took a bright quarter from his pocket and handed it to little Sivert, nodded and went out to his sledge.

Suddenly he asked, "What's the name of this place?"—"Name?"—"What is it called? We have to give it a name."

That was something they hadn't thought about; Inger and Isak looked at each other.

"Sellanrå?" the sheriff said. He must have invented it, perhaps it wasn't even a name, but he said it again, "Sellanrå," nodded and drove off.

Everything at random, the boundaries, the price, the name. . . .

A few weeks later Isak heard on a trip to the village that Geissler, the sheriff, was in trouble; there had been an inquiry into some money he couldn't account for, and the matter had been reported to the district governor. That is how badly things can turn out: some people cavort through life, then they bump up against those who simply walk!

One day when Isak was on his way home after bringing one of his last loads of wood to the village, he had the opportunity of giving Geissler a lift on his sledge. The sheriff simply stepped out of the woods with a suitcase and said, "Give me a ride, will you!"

They drove for a while, neither speaking. Once the sheriff took a flask from his pocket and drank; he also offered it to Isak, who declined. "I'm worried about my stomach on this trip," the sheriff said.

He began talking about Isak's farm deal. "I attended to the matter at once and added my warm recommendation. Sellanrå is a nice name. Frankly, they should let you have the place for nothing, but if I'd written that, the state would've become unreasonable and set its own price. I wrote fifty dollars."—"So you didn't write one hundred dollars?" The sheriff knitted his brows and thought it over. "As far as I recall, I wrote fifty dollars."

"Where are you headed now?" Isak asked. "Over to Vesterbotten, to my wife's family."—"It won't be easy to cross the mountain at this time of year."—"I'll manage. Couldn't you go with me a bit?"—"Surely; you won't go alone."

They came to the farm, and the sheriff stayed the night in the side room. In the morning he took another nip from his flask and said, "I suspect I'll ruin my stomach on this trip." Otherwise he was much the same as the last time, benevolently peremptory but fidgety, and not much concerned with his lot; perhaps it wasn't so tragic, after all. When Isak ventured to point out that not the whole hillside was cultivated, but only bits of it, a few small parcels, the sheriff gave an astonishing answer: "That I fully understood when I sat here writing the report that time. But my driver, Brede, understood nothing—he's a real smart guy. The Department has a kind of table. When such a large cultivated area as the one I declared yielded so few loads of hay and so few barrels of potatoes, the Department table says that the soil is lousy, cheap. I sided with you, and I'll stake my eternal bliss on that piece of roguery. We should have 32,000 fellows like you in this country." The sheriff nodded and turned to Inger: "How old is the smaller one?"—"He's nine months now."—"Oh, it's a boy?"—"Yes."

"But you keep at it and get your farm deal in order as soon as possible," he told Isak. "Now another man wants to buy land midway between here and the village, and then the price of this place will go up. You buy first, then it can go up afterwards. That way you'll have something to show for your toil. You were the one who started it all in the wilderness."

They were grateful for his advice and asked if he wouldn't see the deal through himself. He replied that he had done what he could, now it all depended on the government. "I'm going to Vesterbotten and won't be back," he said straight out.

He gave Inger a quarter, which was all too much. "Remember to bring some meat to my family in the village," he said, "a calf or sheep, whatever you have. My wife will pay. Also, take a couple of goat cheeses along now and then, the children love them."

Isak went with him over the mountain; up on the heights there was hard crusted snow so it was easy to walk. Isak got a whole dollar.

And so Geissler, the sheriff, went away and didn't return to the parish. Just as well, people thought, he was looked upon as an unreliable person and an adventurer. Not that he wasn't sufficiently knowledgeable, he was a learned man and had studied a lot, but he lived on an overly grand scale and used other people's money. It was reported that he had made his escape after a sharp letter from District Governor Pleym; but nothing was done to his family, a wife and three children, and they went on living in the parish for a good while afterward. Incidentally, it wasn't long before the missing money was sent from Sweden, so the sheriff's family in no way continued to be held hostage but stayed on of their own accord.

The said Geissler had certainly not treated Isak and Inger badly, quite the contrary. God only knew what the new sheriff would be like, whether the entire homestead deal wouldn't have to be done over again.



The district governor sent one of his clerks up to the parish; that was the new sheriff. He was a man around forty, the son of a tax collector, and was called Heyerdahl; he had been too poor to study and become a public official, but he had been a scribe in the district governor's office for fifteen years. Since he could never afford to marry, he was a bachelor; Pleym, the district governor, had inherited him from his predecessor and given him the same wretched salary he had received before. Heyerdahl accepted his salary and went on writing. He turned into a cowed and withered man, but watchful and just; he was also good at the job he had once been taught, as far as his ability went. Now that he became sheriff, he began to develop considerable self-esteem.

Isak plucked up courage and went to see him.

"The Sellanrå case—oh, yes, here it is, returned from the Department. They want an explanation of a lot of things, this fellow Geissler left everything in a mess," the sheriff said. "The Royal Department would like to know whether there are extensive and possibly fine cloudberry bogs on the property. Whether there is timberland. Whether there may possibly be ores or a good deal of metals in the mountains round about. A large mountain lake is mentioned, is there fish in it? True enough, this Geissler fellow has given some information, but he wasn't a man to be trusted, of course, so I have to sit here and go through everything after him. I'll come up to your place, to Sellanrå, shortly to examine and approve everything. How many miles is it up there? The Royal Department requests proper boundaries to be paced off, and that has to be done, of course."—"It'll be hard to pace off boundaries before well into the summer," Isak says. "Oh, I believe it can be done. We cannot wait till late summer with answering the Department. I'll be coming up one of these days. I'll be selling some tillable land on the state's behalf to another man on the same trip."—"Is it the one who's buying halfway between me and the village?"—"That I don't know, well, maybe so. A man from here, my appraiser as it happens, my bailiff. He inquired of Geissler about buying, but Geissler turned him down, telling him he couldn't even till a few hundred feet! Then the man wrote to the district governor's office, and now I've been requested to give my opinion of the case. Oh, that Geissler!"

Sheriff Heyerdahl did come up to the homestead with Brede, the appraiser, in tow; they had got their feet wet walking the moors and grew even more wet when they had to pace off boundaries up the mountain in melting spring snow. The sheriff was eager the first day, but the next day he got tired and stayed behind, far down, just calling and pointing. There was no longer any talk of prospecting "the mountains round about," and the cloudberry bogs would be most carefully examined on the way home, he said.

The Department had come up with many questions, no doubt again following a table. The only one that made sense was the question about the timberland. True, there was some timber, and it happened to be within Isak's one and a half mile, but there was no lumber for sale, only for household use, or a bit more. But even if there had been plenty of timber, who could haul it for miles and miles to where people lived? The only one who could do that was Isak, the water troll, hauling a few logs to the village in the course of the winter and bringing back boards and planks.

It turned out that Geissler, remarkable man that he was, had given a description that couldn't be improved upon. There sat the new sheriff, trying to refute him and find something to correct, but he gave up. He only asked the advice of his companion and appraiser more often than Geissler had done, and paid attention to his words; and that same appraiser must have converted and changed his views after himself becoming a buyer of land in the national common. "What do you think of the price?" the sheriff asked. "Fifty dollars is plenty enough for the one who has to buy," the appraiser replied. The sheriff formulated it in proper language. Geissler had written: "The man will from now on also have to pay an annual tax, and he can see no way of paying a higher purchase price than fifty dollars, distributed over ten years. The state can accept his offer or take away his land and the fruit of his labor." Heyerdahl wrote: "The man respectfully petitions the Department to be allowed to retain the land which is not his, but on which he has spent a considerable amount of work, for 50—fifty—dollars, to be paid in installments at the kind discretion of the Department."

"I think I'll manage to secure the property for you," Sheriff Heyerdahl told Isak.

## VI

Today the big bull will be going away. It has grown into a huge animal and become too expensive to keep on the farm, so Isak will take it to the village, sell it, and bring back a suitable one-year-old bullock.

It is Inger who has pushed this through, and Inger no doubt knew what she was doing when she sent Isak away exactly today.

"If you're going, it has to be today," she said. "The bull is full-grown, they pay well for cattle beef in the spring; he can be sent to the city and fetch a fantastic price."—"All right," Isak said. "The worst of it is that the bull might make trouble for you on the road." Isak said nothing to that. "But by now he has been outdoors for a week or so, looking around and getting used to things." Isak made no answer. He just strapped on a long sheath knife and led the bull out.

Oh, what a whopper, glossy and fearsome, its flanks rocking when it walked. It was rather short-legged; when it ran it broke down the underbrush with its chest, it was like a locomotive. Its neck was massive to the point of deformity, its strength that of an elephant.

"If only he won't turn vicious," Inger said. "Well, in that case I'll have to butcher him on the way and carry the meat," Isak replied after a moment.

Inger sat down on the doorstep. She was in pain, and her face was blotchy; she had kept on her feet until Isak left—there he disappeared into the forest with the bull, and Inger could moan without danger. Little Elseus, who can talk already, asks, "Mama pain?"—"Yes, pain." Imitating his mother, he places his hand on his back and moans. Little Sivert is asleep.

Inger takes Elseus inside, gives him things to play with on the floor and goes to bed. Her time had come. She is in possession of her senses all along, keeping an eye on Elseus while casting a glance at the wall to see what time it is. She doesn't scream and barely moves; a struggle is taking place in her bowels, and suddenly a burden slides away from her. At nearly the same moment she hears a strange cry in her bed, a little voice, blessed and pitiful, and now she cannot rest but sits up and looks down at herself. What does she see? Instantly, her face turns gray and expressionless, witless, and a groan is heard, unnatural, impossible, like a twisted howl.

She sinks back in the bed. A minute passes, she is restless, the little cry in the bed grows louder, she lifts herself up again to see—oh God, the worst of all, no mercy, and besides the child was a girl.

Isak was possibly less than three miles away, it was barely an hour since he had left. In the course of ten minutes the child had been born and killed. . . .

Isak returned after two days, with an underfed one-year-old bullock that could barely move on a leash; that was why it had taken so long.

"How did it go?" Inger asked, though she was so sick and depressed.

It had gone so-so. Well, the big bull had been mad for the last three miles, so Isak had been forced to tie it up and fetch help from the village. When he came back, the bull had broken loose and couldn't be found for quite a while. But everything went all right, the storekeeper who bought up stock for the city had paid well. "And here's the new bullock," Isak said, "let the children come and look!"

The same interest in every new animal! Inger looked at the bullock, touched it and asked the price; little Sivert was allowed to sit on its back. "I miss the big bull so badly," Inger said, "he was so sweet and glossy. I do hope they'll butcher him nicely!"

The days were taken up with the seasonal chores; the cattle had been let out, and in the empty cowshed were crates and bins of potatoes put there to sprout. Isak sowed even more grain this year, taking the utmost pains to get it properly into the ground, and he made beds for carrots and turnips, while Inger put in the seeds. Everything went on as before.

Inger went for a while with a bag of hay on her stomach to look pregnant, gradually reducing the hay and in the end discarding the bag. Finally one day Isak noticed something and asked in surprise, "So nothing came of it this time, eh?"—"No," she said, "not this time."—"Uh, why not?"—"It wasn't meant to be, I suppose. Isak, how long do you think it'll take you to till all this land that we see before us?"—"Did you lose it?" he asked. "Yes."—"I see. And you're not hurt yourself?"—"No. I've often wondered if we shouldn't get ourselves a pig." Isak, slow as usual, answered after a while: "A pig, sure—I've thought about that myself every spring. But as long as we don't have more potatoes, and more small potatoes, and a bit of grain, we have nothing to feed him with. We'll see what happens this year."—"It would be nice to have a pig."—"Yes."

The days go by, rain falls, and the fields and the meadows look promising; something is bound to come of it this year! Small and big adventures follow—food, sleep and work, Sundays with washed faces and combed hair, and with Isak sitting in a new red shirt that Inger has woven and sewed. Then it happens that the even tenor of life is upset by a bigger event: a sheep and its lamb have got stuck in a cleft among the rocks. When the sheep return home in the evening, Inger realizes at once that two are missing, so Isak must go and look for them. Isak's first thought is that, if worst came to worst, luckily it was Sunday so he wouldn't waste his time by not working. He looks for hours in an endless pasture land, walking and walking; at home the whole house is in suspense, the mother hushes the children by telling them tersely that two sheep are lost, quiet! Everyone is concerned, the whole small community, even the cows understand that something unusual is amiss and moo, because Inger steps out now and then and calls in a loud voice toward the woods, though it will soon be night. It is an event of the wilderness, a communal misfortune. As soon as Inger has bedded the children, she goes out to look as well. Once in a while she gives a call, but there is no answer. Isak must be far away.

Where in the world are the sheep, what has happened to them? Are there bears abroad? Have wolves crossed the mountain from Sweden and Finland? Neither one nor the other: when Isak finds the sheep it is stuck in a rocky cleft, with a broken leg and a torn-up udder. It must have been confined to the cleft a long time, for although it is badly hurt it has nibbled the grass down to the roots nearby. When Isak lifts the sheep out and frees it, the first thing it does is to start grazing. The lamb suckles at once, it is pure medicine for the poor hurting udder to be emptied.

Isak gathers stones and fills up the dangerous cleft, that treacherous cleft; it shall never again break a sheep's leg! Isak takes off his leather suspenders and straps them around the sheep to keep the torn udder in place. Then he lifts the sheep onto his shoulder and walks homeward with it. The lamb follows.

Afterward? Splints and tarred rags. In a few days the ewe begins to twitch its sick leg because the wound itches as it heals. Yes, everything is all right again—until next time something happens.

Everyday life, events that completely absorb the settlers. Oh, it's by no means trifles, it's fate—happiness, enjoyment and well-being are at stake.

Isak uses the time between the work seasons to shape up some new logs lying around, whatever he may have in mind. Besides, he digs out many a useful stone and gets it down to the house; when he has gathered enough stones, he puts them together into a wall. If things had been the way they were a year ago or so, Inger would have been curious and wondered what her husband had in mind, but now she was mostly occupied with her own concerns and asked no questions. Inger is hard-working as before and takes care of the house, the children and the animals, but she has started to sing, which she didn't do before, and she is teaching Eleseus his evening prayers, which she didn't do before. Isak misses her questions—it was her praise of all he accomplished and her curiosity that made him the contented man he was, a man without his equal; now when she passes by she says at most that he is working himself to death. She must have lost it the last time, after all, he thinks to himself.

Oline comes visiting again. If it had been like last year, she would have been welcome, but things have changed. Inger shows ill-will toward her from the very first moment, whatever the reason might be; Inger has become hostile.

"I halfway thought I came at the right time again," Oline said affectedly. "How?"—"Well, for the third one to be christened. How about it?"—"No," Inger said, "for that matter you could've saved yourself the trouble."—"I see."

Then Oline begins to sing the praises of the little boys, who have grown so tall and handsome, and of Isak, who tills the soil and is by the looks of it going to build again—grand, nothing like it anywhere! "And can you tell me what he's going to build?"—"No, I can't, you'll have to ask him."—"No," Oline said, "it's none of my business. I just wanted to see how you were doing, because that's a great joy to me, a real treat. I won't even open my lips and ask about Goldenhorn, she just couldn't be better off."

Some time is passed in friendly chatter, and Inger is no longer so brusque. When the clock on the wall strikes the hour with such a gorgeous sound, Oline gets tears in her eyes; never in her humble life has she heard such a church organ. Inger again acts rich and generous toward her poor relation and says, "Come into the side room and I'll show you my loom."

Oline stays the whole day. She talks to Isak and praises all his doings. "They tell me you've bought six miles on all sides, couldn't you have got it for nothing? Who begrudged you?"

Now that Isak gets the praise he has missed, he acts more like a big shot. "I'm buying from the government, you know," he answers. "Sure; but why should the government behave like a beast of prey toward you? What are you building?"—"I don't know. It won't amount to much."—"You toil and build. You have painted doors and a wall clock that strikes the hours, so I guess you're building a grand new house?"—"Quit joking!" Isak replies. But he is very pleased and tells Inger, "How about making a bit of cream porridge for our visitor?"—"I can't," Inger replies, "I've just churned."—"I'm not joking, I'm only a simple woman who would like to know," Oline hastens to answer. "Well, if it won't be a grand new house, it must be a huge barn for your grain harvest. Here you have fields and meadows, and things grow like in the Bible, full of milk and honey."

"What's the outlook for the harvest your way?" Isak asks. "Well, it's still there. But who knows if the Lord won't set it on fire this year too and burn it up, may I be forgiven! It's all in his hand and almighty power. But there's nothing nearly as grand anyplace in our parts as here with you, that's most certainly true."

Inger inquires about other kin, especially Uncle Sivert, township treasurer, the big shot of the family who has a seine and a boat-house and hardly knows what to do with all his money. During this exchange, Isak is more and more lost sight of and his new building venture forgotten. So he finally says, "Well, if you really want to know, Oline, it's nothing else than a small barn with a threshing floor I'm trying to build."

"I knew it!" Oline replied. "Fine folks usually think forward and backward and have everything in their heads. I can't think of a pot or pitcher you haven't puzzled out. Threshing floor, did you say?"

Isak is a big child, he can't resist Oline's flattery and makes a fool of himself. "As far as the new building is concerned, it must have a threshing floor, yes, that is my intent and purpose," he says. "Threshing floor!" Oline says admiringly, wagging her head. "Because what's the use of having grain in the field if we can't thresh it?"—"It's just as I say: you figure it all out in your head." Inger has again become grim, the chatter of the two has probably provoked her, for suddenly she says, "Cream porridge—where am I going to get the cream from? Is there cream in the river?"

Oline meets the threat. "My dear Inger, bless you, here's my prayer to you: Forget about cream porridge, don't even mention it! For someone like me, dragging myself from one farm to another!"

After sitting for another few moments, Isak says, "Here I sit when I'm supposed to be digging more stones for my wall!"— "Yes, lots of stones are needed for a wall like that!"—"Stones?" Isak answers. "Huh, it's like there would never be enough."

When Isak is gone the two women get along better, they have so much parish news to talk about and the hours go by. In the evening Oline gets to see how much the herd has grown, with three cows, counting the bullock, two calves, and a swarm of sheep and goats. "Where will it all end?" Oline asks, looking up at the heavens.

She stays the night.

But the next day she leaves. Once more she has gotten something in a bundle to take with her, and since Isak is in the quarry she makes a short detour to avoid him.

Two hours later Oline comes back, steps into the house and says, "Where's Isak?"

Inger is doing the dishes. She realizes that Oline must have passed by Isak and the boys in the quarry and at once smells a rat. "Isak? What do you want with Isak?"—"Uh, what I want with him! I didn't have a chance to say goodbye." Silence. Without further ado Oline drops down on a bench, as if her legs refused to carry her any longer. By her near faint, she means to announce something unusual.

Inger cannot control herself anymore, her face is all rage and fear, and she says, "I received a greeting from you through Os-Anders. A nice greeting that was!"—"How?"—"It was a hare."—"What are you saying?" Oline asks, in a strangely gentle voice. "Don't try to deny it!" Inger cries, a fierce look in her eyes. "I'll smack your mug with this wooden scoop! There!"<sup>3</sup> Did she hit her? Certainly. And since Oline doesn't fall at the first blow but instead taunts her and cries, "Beware! I know what I know about you," Inger goes on using the scoop, knocks Oline down and, getting on top of her, mauls her with her knees.

"Are you going to put an end to me?" Oline asks. She had this dreadful harelip over her, a big strong woman with a paddle-sized ladle in her hand. Oline had already a bump from the blow and was bleeding, but she went on with her taunts and didn't give up. "So you want to put an end to me, too."—"Yes, kill you," Inger answers, striking her. "Take that! I'll strike you dead!" She was certain now, Oline knew her secret and she no longer cared about anything. "Take that in your ugly puss!"—"My puss? You're the one with an ugly puss!" Oline groans. "The Lord has cut a cross into your face."

Oline being so tough to overcome, so damn tough, Inger has to stop her blows; they are good for nothing and merely wear her down. But she threatens her—oh, she threatens Oline with the scoop right to her face, telling her she'll get more, she'll get enough and to spare! "I have a kitchen knife, I'll show you!"

She gets up as though to look for the knife, the kitchen knife, but now her worst agitation is over and she only scolds her. Oline manages to get up on the bench again, blue and yellow blotches in her face, puffed up and bleeding; she brushes away her hair, straightens her kerchief and spits. Her mouth is swollen. "You beast!" she says.

"You've been sniffing around in the woods," Inger cries, "that's what you've used the hours for, you've found the tiny grave. But you should've dug a hole for yourself while you were at it."—"I'll show you!" Oline replies, aflame with vengefulness. "That's all I'll say; but you can forget about your fancy house with one room beside another and your clock that sounds like an organ."—"That's not for you to decide."—"Oline will see to that, all right."

The two women quarrel about this. Far from being gruff and loud, Oline is outright peaceable in her cruel spite; but she is malicious and dangerous. "I'll go look for my bundle, I'm sorry I left it behind in the woods. You'll get your wool back, I want none of it!"—"Ah, so you think I've stolen it?"—"You know yourself what you've done."

Then they quarrel about that. Inger offers to show her the sheep she has sheared the wool from, whereupon Oline says, in her peaceable, mealy-mouthed way, "All right, but who knows where you got the first sheep from?" Inger gives the names of the people and the place where her first sheep were being kept, together with their lambs. "And you'd better put a lock on that mouth of yours!" she threatens. "Haha!" Oline chuckles. She is never at a loss for an answer and doesn't give up. "My mouth? How about your own mouth?" She points at Inger's disfigurement and calls her a sight for God and men. Inger replies with a snarl, and since Oline is fat she calls her a bag of lard—"what a beastly bag of lard you are! And many thanks for the hare that you sent me!"—"The hare? If only I'd been so free from sin as I'm blameless for that hare! How did he look?"—"How does a hare look?"—"Like you. Just like you. And you shouldn't need to look at hares."—"Out with you!" Inger screams. "It was you who let Os-Anders come here with that hare. I'll have you sent to prison."—"Prison? Did you say prison?"—"You begrudge me everything I have, you're burned up with envy of me," Inger goes on. "You've scarcely been able to sleep since I married and got Isak and all that's here. Good God, woman, what do you want with me? Is it my fault that your children didn't get anywhere and become something? You can't bear to see that my children are well-formed and have grander names than yours, and as for flesh and blood, can I help it if they are handsomer than yours were!"

If something would make Oline furious, this was it. She had been a mother so many times and had nothing except her children, such as they were; she turned them into good children and boasted of them, telling lies about merits they didn't have and hiding their faults. "What are you saying?" she replied to Inger. "That you don't sink into the ground for shame! My children, who were like a heavenly host of bright angels by comparison to yours! Is it my children you dare speak about that way? They were God's creatures when they were small, all seven of them, and now every one is big and grown. Just don't bother!"—"What about Lise, didn't she go to

prison, how was that?" Inger asks. "She hadn't done anything, she was as innocent as a lily," Oline answers. "And she's married in Bergen and wears a hat, but what about you?"—"And there was Nils, how was that?"—"I'll not lower myself and answer you. But one of yours is now lying over in the woods, what did you do with it? You killed it!"—"You damn old witch, out you go, and double-quick!" Inger again screams, pressing Oline hard.

But Oline doesn't give way, she doesn't even stand up. This fearlessness paralyzes Inger again and she simply says, "Oh, I'll get that kitchen knife right this minute!"—"Don't bother," Oline advises her, "I'll go of my own accord. But as for you, showing your own kin the door, you are a beast!"—"All right, just go!"

But Oline does not go. The two women continue quarreling for quite a while, and every time the clock strikes the hour or the half hour, Oline laughs scornfully, making Inger furious. At length they both quiet down some and Oline gets ready to leave. "I have a long way and the night is coming on," she says. "I could've taken a bit of food with me, of course, what a pity I didn't," she says.

Inger has nothing to say to that, she has recovered her wits and pours some water in a dish for Oline. "There—if you want to wipe yourself," she says. Oline realizes she ought to make herself presentable before she leaves, but since she doesn't know where the blood is, she washes the wrong places. After watching this for a while, Inger points and says, "There—touch up the temple, too. No, the other temple, don't you see I'm pointing at it!"—"How could I know which temple you're pointing at!" Oline answers. "There's some more on your mouth, too. You're afraid of water, maybe?" Inger asks.

The upshot is that Inger has to wash Oline's wounds and to toss her a towel.

"Come to think of it," Oline says as she wipes herself, now perfectly peaceable again, "how will Isak and the kids manage?"—"Does he know?" Inger asks. "Doesn't he know! He came up and saw it."—"What did he say?"—"What could he say? He was dumbfounded, like me."

Silence.

"You are to blame for everything," Inger wails, bursting into tears. "I wish I was that free of sin."—"I'll ask Os-Anders, you bet I will."—"Go ahead!"

They talk it over calmly, and Oline seems to get less revengeful. She is a politician of high rank and used to finding remedies, and now she even expresses a kind of compassion, saying, "It'll be too bad about Isak and the little ones when it gets known."—"Yes," Inger says, crying again. "I've pondered and pondered it day and night." Oline sees herself as a savior, thinking she could be of some help. Perhaps she could come and stay on the place when Inger was arrested.

Inger doesn't cry anymore, it's as though she is listening and thinking it over. "No, you won't look after the children."—"Won't I look after the children? You must be joking."—"Really."—"If I have a heart for anything, it is for children."—"Sure, your own," Inger says, "but how would you treat mine? And when I think that you sent me that hare simply to ruin me, you seem no better than a bagful of sin."—"I?" Oline asks. "You mean me?"—"Yes, I mean you," Inger answers, crying. "You've acted like the worst scum toward me, and I don't trust you. And besides, you'd just steal all our wool if you came here. And one goat cheese after another would go to your folks and not to mine."—"You're a beast!" Oline said.

Inger cries and wipes her eyes, talking between times. Oline certainly doesn't want to be pushy, she can stay with Nils, her son, as she has been doing all along. But now, when Inger goes to prison, Isak and the innocent little ones will be helpless, and Oline could be here and keep an eye on them. She makes it sound tempting, it wouldn't turn out badly at all. "You can think about it," she says.

Inger is defeated. She cries and shakes her head, looking down. Acting like a sleepwalker, she goes out to the shed and prepares a packet of food for the visitor. "Oh, you shouldn't go to any trouble," Oline says. "You're not going to cross the mountain without some food," Inger says.

When Oline has gone, Inger sneaks out, looks about her and listens. No, not a sound from the quarry. Walking closer, she can hear the children, they are playing with pebbles. Isak has sat down; he holds the pry between his knees, leaning on it like a stick. There he sits.

Inger sneaks up to the edge of the wood. She had stuck a little cross into the ground someplace; the cross is down, but where it stood the sod has been lifted and the earth scattered about. She sits down and brushes the earth together again with her hand. And there she sits.

She came out of curiosity, to see how much Oline had rummaged in the little grave and keeps sitting there because the cattle haven't yet come home for the night. She cries and shakes her head, looking down at the ground.

## VII

The days go by.

There is a wonderful weather for the soil, with sunshine and showers, and the crops are shaping up accordingly. The settlers are now almost through with the haymaking and have got an abundance of hay, making it difficult to find room for it all. They stow it under the crags, in the stable, underneath the house; they empty the shed of everything and cram that full to the rafters as well. Inger shares in the work, offering indispensable help and support all along, and Isak uses every rainy work period to roof the new barn and get at least the south wall finished, providing room for all the hay in the world. They are making great progress, things will be all right.

The big sorrowful event—it was there, to be sure; the deed was done and the consequences had to come. Good things mostly come by a trackless path, bad things always come with a trail of consequences. Isak took the matter sensibly from the very first, all he said to his wife was, “What have you done?” To this Inger made no answer. In a while Isak spoke again: “You strangled it, did you?”—“Yes,” Inger said. “You shouldn’t have done it.”—“No,” she replied. “And I don’t understand how you could do it.”—“She was just like me,” Inger replied. “How?”—“Her mouth.” Isak thought it over for a long while. “Oh, well,” he said.

Nothing more was said right away, and since the days went by as quietly as before and there was so much hay to bring in and such an exceptionally abundant crop, the misdeed gradually receded in their thoughts. But it was hanging over the people and the place all the time. They couldn’t hope that Oline would remain silent, that was too unsafe. And even if she did, others would talk, the mute witnesses would speak—the living-room walls, the trees around the little grave in the woods. Os-Anders would make hints, Inger would betray herself, awake or asleep. They were prepared for the worst.

What else could Isak do than take the matter sensibly? He now understood why Inger had wished to be by herself at the birth every time, enduring alone the great anxiety over the foetus being well-formed, meeting the danger alone. She had repeated it three times. Isak shook his head and felt sorry for her misfortune, poor Inger. He heard about the Lapp having sent the hare and acquitted her. It led to a great love between them, a mad love; the danger made them take delight in each other, she being full of a raw sweetness for him and he, the log, the water troll, being wild about her, insatiable. She wore shoes of reindeer hide on her feet, but there wasn’t a trace of Lapp in her; rather than small and withered, she was big and gorgeous. Now in the summer she would walk barefoot, with her legs naked way up, and Isak couldn’t take his eyes off those naked legs.

She continued to sing stabs of hymns all summer and to teach Eleseus his prayers, but she developed an unchristian hatred of all Lapps and gave those who came by a piece of her mind. They could have been sent there by someone again, they could easily have another hare in their leather bag, so away with them! “A hare? What hare?”—“Ah, so you haven’t heard what Os-Anders did?”—“No.”—“I don’t mind telling you; he came here with a hare when I was with child.”—“Well, I never! Were you harmed?”—“None of your business, just go! Here you have a little something to stick in your mouth, and then you must go!”—“You wouldn’t have a leather patch for my shoe?”—“No. But I’ll give you a piece of my stick if you don’t go away this minute.”

A Lapp may beg humbly, but if he is refused he turns revengeful and threatens. A pair of Lapps with two children came by the place, and the children were sent into the house to beg but came back and reported there was nobody inside. After the family had talked it over in Lappish for a while, the husband went in to check. He vanished. Then the wife went in, followed by the children; they all kept standing inside chattering in Lappish. The husband sticks his head into the pantry—nobody there either. The wall clock strikes the hour, the family listen in wonder and remain standing.

Inger must have guessed there were strangers about, she came hurriedly down the hillside. When she sees they are Lapps, Lapps she doesn’t even know, she says straight out, “What do you want here? Didn’t you see there was nobody around?”—“M-yeah,” the man says. Inger goes on, “You’d better get out of here.”

The family start off, slowly and reluctantly. “We stopped to listen to your wall clock,” the man says, “it sounded so pretty, out of this world.”—“You wouldn’t have a piece of flatbread for us?” says the wife. “Where are you from?” Inger asks. “From the lakes on the other side. We’ve been walking all night.”—“Where are you going?”—“Over the mountain.”<sup>4</sup> Inger prepares some food for them, and when she comes out with it the wife asks for a bit of stuff for a cap, a wad of wool, and a piece of goat cheese—she needs it all. Inger doesn’t have time, Isak and the boys are in the hayfield. “Be off with you,” she says.

The wife butters her up. “We saw your cattle up in the pasture, the animals were just like the stars in the sky.”—“Out of this world!” the man says too. “You wouldn’t have an old pair of skin boots, would you?”

Inger shuts the door to the house and returns to her work up the slope. Then the man shouted something, which she pretended not to hear as she walked on, but she heard it clearly: “You buy hares, isn’t that so?”

There was no mistaking it. The Lapp asked in good faith perhaps—someone had made him believe it—or perhaps in bad faith; in any case, Inger had gotten a message. It was an omen of things to come. . . .

The days went by. The settlers were robust people; what was to come couldn’t be avoided, so they did their work and waited. They snuggled up to each other like animals in the forest, sleeping and eating; it was now late enough in the season for them to have tried the new potatoes, which were big and mealy. The shock— why didn’t it come? It was already late in August, soon it would be

September, were they to be spared over the winter? They were constantly on guard, cuddling up in their lair every night, happy that the day had passed without anything happening. Time passed this way until October, when the sheriff showed up with a man and a briefcase. The law strode through the door.

The criminal investigation took its time. Inger was interrogated in private; she denied nothing, the grave in the woods was opened and emptied, and the dead body sent for examination. The little body was adorned with Eleseus' christening robe and wore the cap with the beads.

Isak was somehow aroused to speak again: "Well, now things are as bad as they can be with us," he said. "I still say what I said before, that you shouldn't have done it."—"No," Inger replied. "How did you do it?" Inger didn't answer. "How could you have the heart to do it!"—"She was shaped the same as me, so I twisted her face around." Isak shook his head. "And then she died," Inger went on, starting to sob. Isak was silent for a while. "Hm, it's too late to cry now," he said. "She had brown hair on the nape of her neck," Inger sobbed.

And again no more was said.

The days went by once more. Inger was not arrested. The authorities dealt gently with her; Sheriff Heyerdahl interrogated her as he would have interrogated anyone else and just said, "It's a pity that such things happen." When Inger asked who had reported her, the sheriff replied that nobody had; there were many, he had learned about the matter from various quarters. Hadn't she half given herself away to some Lapps? Yes, she had told some Lapps about Os-Anders, who came to her with a hare in the middle of the summer and made the child under her heart harelipped. And hadn't Oline sent the hare? The sheriff knew nothing about that. But in any case, he wouldn't even enter in his records such ignorance and superstition. "My mother saw a hare when she was expecting me," Inger said. . .

The barn was finished, a roomy building with haylofts on both sides and a threshing floor in the middle. The shed and the other temporary places were now vacated and the hay brought into the barn, the grain was cut, dried on poles and carted in, and Inger dug up the carrots and the turnips. Everything was under cover. Now all could have been well—the farm was thriving, Isak was again turning up virgin soil till the frost set in to enlarge the grain field, tiller of the ground that he was—but in November Inger said, "Now she would've been half a year old and have known us all."—"That can't be helped now," Isak said.

During the winter Isak threshed the grain on his new threshing floor, and Inger joined in for long spells and used the flail as well as he, while the boys played among the mounds of hay. The grain was big and plump. Some time into the new year the roads were good for sleighing, and Isak began to haul wood to the village. He had steady buyers now and got well paid for his summer-dried firewood. One day he decided with Inger to take the strapping bull calf Goldenhorn had dropped and bring it down to Mrs. Geissler, along with a goat cheese. The lady was ecstatic and asked what it cost. "Nothing," Isak replied, "the sheriff has already paid for it."—"Has he really, God bless him!" said Mrs. Geissler, touched. She gave him both picture books and cakes and toys to take with him for Eleseus and Sivert. When Isak got home and Inger saw the things, she turned away and cried. "What's wrong?" Isak asked. "Nothing," Inger replied. "She would've been a year old now and could've understood all this."—"Yes, but you know what she was like, after all," Isak said to comfort her. "And besides, maybe it won't be so bad. I've found out the whereabouts of Geissler." Inger pricked up her ears: "Oh, can he help us?"—"I don't know."

Then Isak took the grain to the mill to have it ground and brought flour back home. Afterwards he began in the woods again, cutting the wood for next year. His life went from one job to another according to the seasons, from the soil to the woods and from the woods to the soil again. Isak had worked his farm for six years by now and Inger for five, and all would have been well if it had lasted. It did not last. Inger plied her loom and tended her animals; she also sang a lot of hymns, but good God, what singing, like a bell without a clapper.

As soon as the roads were passable, she was taken to the village for a hearing. Isak had to stay behind. Walking around here alone, he decided to take a trip over to Sweden and look up Geissler; the nice sheriff would perhaps once again show his kindness to the Sellanrå folks. But when Inger came back, she had already inquired and gotten a rough idea of what the sentence would be. Strictly speaking, it was the death penalty, section 1, but . . . Well, she had stood up in the very temple of justice and simply confessed; the two village witnesses had looked at her with pity and the judge's interrogation had been very gentle. All the same, here among the clever practitioners of the law, she was an inferior party. Those high gentlemen, the lawyers, are so clever, they know their sections of the law, they have learned them by heart and remember them, bright as they are. And they aren't devoid of individual common sense either, or even without heart. Inger couldn't complain about the court; she didn't mention the hare, but when she confessed, in tears, that she hadn't wished upon her misshapen child the curse of letting it live, the judge nodded slowly and gravely. "But," he said, "you are harelipped yourself and have done well in life?"—"Yes, thank God!" Inger simply replied. And she didn't get to say anything about the hidden suffering of her childhood and youth.

But the judge must nevertheless have understood something, he himself had a clubfoot and had never been able to dance. "The sentence—well, I don't really know," he said. "Strictly speaking, it's the death penalty, but . . . And I don't know if we can lower the degree, to second or third degree, 12 to 15 years, 9 to 12 years. Some men are right now trying to humanize the criminal code, but they won't finish the job in time. However, we will hope for the best," he said.

Inger came back in a state of listless composure, it had been unnecessary to arrest her. A couple of months had gone by when, one evening, Isak returned from the fishing lake to discover that the sheriff and his new bailiff had been at Sellanrå. Inger was sweet to Isak, pleased to see him back, and bragged of him, though he hadn't caught much fish.

"Come to think, have you had visitors?" he asked. "Visitors? Why do you ask?"—"I see fresh footprints outside. They were wearing boots."—"There haven't been any other visitors than the sheriff and one more."—"I see. What did they want?"—"You know that, don't you?"—"Did they come to pick you up?"—"To pick me up, no. It was only the sentence. And take it from me, Isak, the Lord has been merciful, it didn't turn out as I feared."—"Oh," Isak said anxiously, "then, maybe, they didn't give you that many years?"—"No, only a few years."—"How many?"—"Well, to you it will seem many years, but I thank God for my life."

Inger didn't mention the number. Later in the evening Isak asked when they would come to pick her up, but that she didn't know or refused to disclose. She had grown thoughtful again, saying she didn't know what the future held in store; they would probably have to get Oline to come, and Isak saw no other way out either. What had become of Oline, anyway? She hadn't come this year, as she used to. Did she intend to stay away for good after she had turned their lives topsy-turvy? They finished the work season, but Oline didn't come. Did she expect to be picked up, perhaps? She would come drifting by, all right, the bag of lard, the monster.

Finally one day, there she came. What a woman! It was as though nothing had happened between her and the married couple, she was even knitting a pair of striped socks for Eleseus, she said. "I wanted to see how you were doing on this side of the mountain," she said. It turned out that she had left a bag with her clothes and things in the woods and was prepared to stay.

In the evening Inger took her husband aside and said, "Didn't you say you would try to find Geissler? It's now between the work seasons."—"Yes," Isak replied, "now that Oline is here I'll leave tomorrow morning." Inger was grateful to him for that. "And you must take with you every penny you own," she said. "Why, can't you keep the money here?"—"No."

Inger prepared a big packet of food at once, and Isak woke up before daybreak and made ready to go. Inger walked him out on the door slab; she didn't cry or lament, but said, "You know, they may come for me any day now."—"Do you know anything?"—"No, do I know anything! I don't suppose it will be just yet, but still. If only you found Geissler and got a bit of good advice."

What would Geissler be able to do now? Nothing. But Isak went.

Inger must have known something, though, she may also have seen to it that Oline was notified. When Isak returned from Sweden, Inger had been picked up. Oline was there with the two children.

It was a sad message for Isak to be met with, and he asked in a loud voice, "Is she gone?"—"Yes," Oline replied. "What day was it?"—"The day after you left." Isak now understood that Inger had again wanted him to be away, taking the decision all by herself; that was why she had also asked him to take all his money with him. Oh, Inger could certainly have used a few pennies for herself on that long journey!

But now the little boys were immediately occupied with the small yellow piglet that Isak had brought. For that matter, it was the only thing he had with him: his address for Geissler had been out of date. Geissler was no longer in Sweden but had returned to Norway; he was now in Trondhjem. Isak had carried the piglet from Sweden on his arm, given it milk from a bottle and slept with it on his chest on the mountain; he had meant to cheer up Inger that way, and now Eleseus and Sivert were playing with it and had lots of fun. This diverted Isak somewhat. Besides, Oline could report from the sheriff that the government had finally agreed to the sale of Sellanrå, Isak just had to go to the sheriff's office and make the payment. This was good news and took the edge off Isak's dejection. Though he was weary and tired out from walking, he put fresh provisions in his bag and set off to the village right away. Maybe he had a small hope of catching up with Inger.

It didn't work out, and Inger would be gone for eight years. Isak felt empty and dejected and heard only a word here and there of what the sheriff said: That it was deplorable that such things should happen. He hoped it would serve as a lesson to Inger, so that she reformed and became a better person and didn't kill her children!

Sheriff Heyerdahl had married last year. His wife refused to be a mother, no children for her, thanks! Nor did she have any.

"Finally I can wrap up the Sellanrå case," the sheriff said. "His Majesty's department has agreed to the sale more or less according to my proposal."—"I see," Isak said. "It has taken time, but I have the satisfaction of knowing that my endeavors have not been in vain. What I wrote has been accepted almost to the letter."—"To the letter," Isak said, nodding. "Here is the deed. You can have it registered at the first court session."—"Right," Isak nodded. "What do I have to pay?"—"Ten dollars annually. Well, here the Department has made a small change: ten instead of five dollars a year. I don't know what you think of that?"—"If only I can manage it," Isak said. "And for ten years." Isak looked up, alarmed. "Yes, the Department isn't willing otherwise," the sheriff said. "And it really is no payment for such a large property, cultivated and built up as it now is."

Isak had the ten dollars for this year, received for firewood and for the goat cheese that Inger had saved up. He paid. And he had a bit left.

"It's a real stroke of luck for you that the Department hasn't learned about your wife's conduct," the sheriff said. "Or they would perhaps have found another buyer."—"I see," Isak said and asked, "So she'll now be gone for eight years?"—"Yes, that can't be changed, justice must take its course. Anyway, her sentence is exceedingly light. And now, there is one thing you have to do: you must cut clear boundaries between yourself and the state. Cut down every scrap, in a straight line according to the marks I indicated and entered in my record. The wood will be yours. I'll come and take a look at it later."

Isak trudged home.



## VIII

The years pass quickly, do they? Yes, for the one who is growing old.

Isak was not old, nor had he lost his vigor, so to him the years were long. He worked his farm and let his iron beard grow as it pleased.

Now and then the monotony of the wilderness was interrupted by a Lapp passing by or something happening to one of his animals, whereupon everything again returned to normal. At one time a number of men came walking to Sellanrå, where they rested, ate and got some milk; they asked Isak and Oline about the trail across the mountain, explaining that they were to stake out a telegraph line. Another time it was Geissler—no less a person than Geissler himself. There he came walking up from the village, fresh as a daisy, with two men in tow carrying mining tools, picks, and spades.

Oh, that Geissler! He was the same as ever, unchanged. He said how-de-do, talked to the children, entered the house and came out again, surveyed the fields, opened the doors to the cowshed and the hay barn and peeked in. "Excellent!" he said. "Isak, do you still have those little stones?"—"Stones?" Isak asked. "Those little heavy stones your boy was playing with when I was here once?"

The stones had ended up in the shack and were used as weights for mousetraps, one for each, and now they were retrieved. Geissler and the two men examined and discussed them, tapped them and weighed them in their hands. "Copper ore!" they said. "Can you come along up the mountain and show us where you found them?" Geissler said.

Up they went all together and got to the finding place, which wasn't far off; still, they wandered about in the mountains for a couple of days, looking for veins of metal and setting off blasting shots. They came back to the farm with two heavy bags of small stones.

Isak had by this time talked with Geissler about the purchase of the farm, which had cost one hundred dollars instead of fifty. "Oh, that doesn't matter," Geissler said, unconcerned. "You may have values on the scale of thousands up in this mountain of yours."—"You don't say," Isak said. "But you must have the deed registered as soon as possible."—"Yes."—"So that the government won't start quarreling with you, understand." Isak understood. "It's worse about Inger," he said. "Yes," Geissler said, uncharacteristically pondering the matter for a long while. The case could possibly be reopened. When everything came to light, the sentence would no doubt be somewhat reduced. "But we might apply for pardon and accomplish roughly the same that way."—"Hm, you think so?"—"But we can't apply for pardon yet, only after some time has elapsed. Come to think, you visited my family and brought both meat and goat cheese, how much do I owe you?"—"Oh, your honor has already paid so much."—"Me?"—"And been of such great help."—"No," Geissler said shortly and put down some dollar bills. "Take that!" he said.

He was the sort of man who didn't want anything for nothing, and there seemed to be plenty of money left in his wallet, which was ever so bulky. Still, God knows if he really was that well off.

"But she writes she's doing well," said Isak, who thought about nothing but his own things. "Oh, your wife?"—"Yes. And since she had the baby girl—yes, she's had a big healthy girl."—"That's excellent!"—"Yes, and since then they all help her and are very kind, she says."

"I'm going to send these little stones to some mining experts to find out what's in them," Geissler said. "If there is a good amount of copper in them, you'll get lots of money."—"Aha," Isak said. "And when do you figure we can apply for pardon?"—"After some time. I'm going to write a letter for you. I'll be back later. What did you say, has your wife already had a child since she was taken away?"—"Yes."—"Then they transported her from here when she was with child. That was illegal."—"Oh."—"That's one more reason for releasing her after a while."—"I only wish they would!" Isak said gratefully.

Isak wasn't aware that the authorities had already had to draw up and send back and forth many long documents about his pregnant wife. They had originally refrained from arresting her in her own district for two reasons: they had no lockup for her in the village, and they wanted to be lenient. The consequences were incalculable. Later, when Inger was to be picked up, nobody had inquired about her condition, and she herself had said nothing. Perhaps she had been silent on purpose, in order to have a child around during those painful years: if she conducted herself well, she would most likely be allowed to see it now and then. Or perhaps she had just been listless and consented with indifference to being taken away, despite her condition. . . .

Isak worked and toiled, digging ditches, adding to the tillage, and cutting a boundary between himself and the state; he now had enough cordwood for another year. But since he no longer had Inger to cut a figure for, he worked hard from habit rather than for enjoyment. And he had let two court sessions pass without having the title deed registered, because his heart wasn't in it; this fall, finally, he'd had enough initiative to get it done. Things weren't as they should be with him. Patient and slow he was, to be sure, but now he was patient and slow because he was hobbled. He got out his skins—goatskins and calfskins—because the job had to be done, put them in the stream and removed the hair, laid them in bark and readied them for footwear. In the winter, at the very first threshing, he set aside his seed grain for the spring, just so it would be done; a man of orderly habits, he liked the sense that things were done and over with. But life was gray and lonely, good Lord, yes, with his being once again a bachelor and all.

What joy could he now feel sitting at home on Sundays, washed and wearing a nice red shirt, when he no longer had someone to look nice for! Sundays were the longest days of all, condemning him to idleness and mournful thoughts; all he could do was to stroll

about in the fields and look at everything that should have been done. He took the boys along every time, one of them always on his arm. It was fun to listen to their chatter and to answer their questions.

He kept old Oline for lack of anyone else. All things considered, Oline wasn't that bad—she, too, carded and spun, knitted socks and mittens and made goat cheese. But she lacked a lucky hand and worked without love; nothing of what she touched with her hands was her own. For example, in Inger's time Isak had once bought a very pretty little box at the village store; it stood on a shelf, was of china, and had a dog's head on the lid. It was probably a sort of tobacco jar. Oline removed the lid and dropped it on the floor. Inger had left behind some fuchsia cuttings under glass in a crate; Oline removed the glass covers and thrust them on again, hard and spitefully. Next day all the cuttings were dead. It couldn't have been very easy for Isak to witness all this, he may have made a face; and since there was nothing soft or swanlike about him, it was possibly a threatening face. Oline, stubborn and mealy-mouthed, groused: "Could I help it!"—"Well," Isak said, "I don't know, but you could've left them alone."—"I won't ever touch her flowers again," Oline then said. But now they were dead.

And why did the Lapps drop in at Sellanrå so often these days, more so than before? What business did Os-Anders have here, couldn't he simply walk by? In the course of one summer he crossed the mountain twice, and Os-Anders didn't, after all, have any reindeer to look after, but lived from begging and staying with other Lapps. When he came to Isak's place, Oline dropped all her work and started gossiping with him about people in the parish, and when he left, his bag was heavy with all sorts of things. Isak maintained a seditious silence for two years.

Then Oline wanted a new pair of shoes again, and that put an end to his silence. This was in the fall, and Oline was wearing out shoe leather every day instead of walking about in skin boots or pattens. "We're having fine weather these days. Hm!" Isak began. "Yeah," Oline said. "Elseus, didn't you count ten goat cheeses on the shelf this morning?" Isak asked. "Oh yes," Elseus answered. "Now there are no more than nine."

Elseus counted them once more, thought hard inside that little head of his and said, "Yes, and the one that Os-Anders got. That makes ten."

Silence in the room. Little Sivert also wanted to count and repeated his brother's words: "That makes ten."

Another silence. Then at last Oline had to explain herself: "Yes, he got a wee little cheese. I didn't think it would matter. But no sooner can small fry talk than they show what's in them. And I can figure out and calculate who they take after! Because they don't take after you, Isak, that I know."

A hint that Isak had to repudiate. "The children are all right. But can you tell me what good turns Os-Anders has done me and my family?"—"Good turns?" Oline says. "Yes."—"Os-Anders?" she says. "Yes. Since I owe him goat cheeses?" Having gained time, Oline answers as follows: "God save me from you, Isak! Was it I who got started on Os-Anders? If I did so much as mention his name, let me fall dead in my tracks!"

Brilliant. Isak has to give in, as so many a time before.

Oline didn't give in. "And if you mean that I am to go flat out barefoot now that winter is coming and be without shoes, which the good Lord created for a body's feet, then you must let me know. I dropped a word about shoes both three and four weeks ago, but I see no signs of them, and here I walk around as before."—"What's wrong with your pattens, seeing that you don't use them?" Isak asked. "What's wrong with them?" Oline says, taken by surprise. "Yes, what, I ask?"—"The pattens?"—"Yes."—"You don't mention that I card and spin, tend the animals and keep the children tidy, that you don't mention. And for that matter, I suppose your wife, who is in prison, didn't walk—well, she probably didn't walk barefoot in the snow either."—"No, she wore pattens," Isak said. "And for going to church and visiting decent folks, she wore skin boots," he said. "Sure," Oline replied, "she was so much grander, of course!"—"Yes, she was. And when she wore skin boots in the summer, she had nothing but pure couch grass in them. But you—you use socks in your shoes all year round."

"As far as that goes," Oline said, "I think I'll manage to wear out the pattens. I didn't think it was urgent to wear out such good pattens on purpose." She spoke in a soft, muffled voice, but her eyes were half-closed; she was very wily. "Inger," she said, "the changeling as we called her, went about with my children and learned both this and that for ever so many years. And this is what we get in return. If my daughter in Bergen can wear a hat, why shouldn't Inger? That's probably what she went south for, yeah, she went to Trondhjem to buy herself a hat—heh-heh."

Isak stood up and wanted to go out. But now Oline had opened her heart, showing her store of blackness; indeed, she radiated darkness and declared that none of her daughters had their faces torn up, like some fire-breathing dragon—"yes, why not say it!" But they were none the worse for that. It wasn't everyone who could have the knack of killing children. "Beware!" Isak cried, and to make himself perfectly clear, he added, "Accursed woman!"

But Oline didn't beware, oh no. "Heh-heh!" she said, looking up at the heavens to intimate that it really was an abuse of being harelipped to display it the way certain folks did. There was a limit to everything!

Isak must have been glad to finally slip out of the house. And what could he do but get Oline some shoes? A tiller of the soil in the woodland, he was anything but godlike, able to cross his arms and tell his servant: "Go!" As an indispensable housekeeper, she was safe whatever she said or did.

The nights are cool, with a full moon, the bogs harden till they can bear a man in a pinch, but during the day the sun thaws them again and makes them unpassable. Isak goes to the village one cool night to order shoes for Oline. He takes two goat cheeses with him for Mrs. Geissler.

Halfway to the village a new settler has staked out a place. He must be a man of some means, since he had used construction workers from the village to build his house, as well as hired help to plow a patch of sandy marsh for potatoes; he did little or nothing himself. The man was Brede Olsen, sheriff's clerk and bailiff, a man to go to when the doctor had to be fetched or the parson's wife wanted to have her pig butchered. He wasn't yet thirty, but had four children to provide for, besides his wife, who was as good as a child herself. Oh, Brede's wealth wasn't very great perhaps, it wasn't really profitable to be a big shot and rush around levying distresses upon people; now he wanted to try farming. He had borrowed money in the bank for his house in the wilds. His place was called Breidablik; it was Sheriff Heyerdahl's wife who had given him this lovely name for the place.

Isak hurries past the new settlement and doesn't take the time to drop in, but the window is already packed with children, early in the morning though it is. Isak is in a hurry because he means to be back as far as this the following night, when the roads are passable. There are lots of things a man in the wilderness has to figure out and fit in as best he can. It's not that he is so terribly busy just now, but he is worried about the boys, left alone with Oline.

As he walks along he remembers the first time he came this way. Time has gone by, the last two years have been long; many good things have happened at Sellanrå, as well as some bad ones, good Lord, yes! So now another clearing had been made in the wilds; Isak recognized the spot very well, it was one of the pleasant spots he had himself examined during his trek but passed by. It was closer to the village here, to be sure, but the timber was not as good; the ground was level, but boggy, and though the soil was easy to work, it was difficult to drain. Goodman Brede wouldn't have a field simply by turning over bog. And what was the idea—wasn't Brede going to put up a shed at the end of his hay barn for his implements and carts? Isak noticed that a cart was standing in the middle of the yard, out in the open.

He carries out his errand at the shoemaker's, and since Mrs. Geissler has gone away, he sells his goat cheeses to the storekeeper. And in the evening he sets out for home. The ground freezes over more and more so it's easy to walk, but his gait is heavy. God knows when Geissler would be back, now that his wife had left, perhaps he would never be back. Inger was gone and time was passing.

He doesn't drop by at Brede's on his way back either, no, he makes a detour around Breidablik and manages to get past. He doesn't want to talk to people, only go on walking. Brede's cart is still there, will he leave it there? he wonders. Well, to each his own! He—that is, Isak himself—has both a cart and a shed for it, but he's none the better for it: his home is only half a home; once it was whole, but now it's merely half.

By the middle of the day, when he has gotten far enough to see his home over on the hillside, his mood brightens, though he is tired and worn-out with walking after a couple of days and nights on the road: there is the house, with smoke rising from the chimney; both the boys are outside and come to meet him as soon as he appears. Going in, he finds two Lapps in the room; surprised, Oline gets up from her stool and says, "What—you're back already!" She is making coffee on the stove. Coffee? Coffee!

Isak has noticed it before, of course. When Os-Anders and other Lapps have been here, Oline makes coffee in Inger's little pot for a long time afterwards. She does it when Isak is out in the woods or in the fields, and when he inadvertently catches her at it he doesn't say a word. But he knows that, after each time, he is the poorer by a goat cheese or a wad of wool. Therefore it's something of a feat for Isak to forbear grabbing Oline and crushing her to pieces between his fingers for her meanness. All in all, Isak is definitely trying to become a better and better person, whatever he means by it, whether he does it for the sake of domestic peace or he hopes God will return Inger to him sooner that way. He has a penchant for brooding and superstition, even his peasant shrewdness is guileless. Thus, in early fall, when it turned out that the sod roof on his stable began to sag down on the horse, Isak simply chewed his iron beard a few times and then smiled like someone who understood a joke and firmed up the roof with some crossbars. Not a bad word escaped him. Another episode: the shack where he had his food stored away was built only on high stone pillars at the corners. Small birds got into the shack through the big gaps in the walls and fluttered about in there unable to get out. Oline complained that the juncos pecked at the victuals, padded about on the cured meat and did what was worse on it. "It's too bad," Isak said, "if the birds get in and can't find their way out again." Then, in the midst of a busy time, he quarried some stones and closed the gaps in the walls.

God knows what he meant by it, whether he hoped to get Inger back before long if he was on his best behavior.

## IX

The years go by.

Once more an engineer, with a foreman and two workers, came to Sellanrå; once again they were going to pace off a telegraph line over the mountain. If they continued along their present route, the line would run slightly above the house, and a straight road would be cleared in the forest. There was no harm in that, it would make the place less desolate, letting in the world and light.

"This place will now become the midpoint between two valleys," the engineer said, "and you may be offered the job of inspector for the line in both directions."—"I see," Isak said. "You'll get twenty-five dollars a year."—"Well," Isak said, "but what do I have to do for the money?"—"Keep the line in order, repair the wire when it breaks, clear away underbrush that interferes with the line. You'll receive a nice little machine to put on the wall, it will tell you when to make a move. And then you have to drop everything and go."

Isak thought it over. "I could take on the work in the winter," he said. "The whole year," the engineer said, "of course the whole year, summer and winter."—"Spring and summer and fall, my farm keeps me busy, and I have no time to spare for other things."

The engineer couldn't help looking at him for quite a while before he asked him the following astonishing question: "Can you make more money that way?"—"Money?" Isak said. "Would you make more money working your farm the days you could be inspecting the line?"—"Well, that I don't know," Isak replied. "It's just that I'm here to till the soil. I have many people and even more animals to provide for. We live off the land."—"All right, I can offer the job to someone else," the engineer said.

Actually, this threat seemed only to relieve Isak, and being reluctant, no doubt, to go against the will of the worthy gentleman, he explained himself: "The fact is I have a horse and five cows, not counting the bullock. And I have twenty sheep and sixteen goats. The animals give us food and wool and hides, and they have to be fed."—"That's clear," the engineer said curtly. "Yes. And how could I provide fodder for them all if I had to leave during the work seasons and look after the telegraph line? That's what I would like to know."—"We won't say another word about it," the engineer said. "The man here below, Brede Olsen, will get the job, he'll be glad to accept it." The engineer turned to his men and said a few words: "Let's get on, boys!"

Oline no doubt sensed by the tone that Isak had been stubborn and unreasonable, and it couldn't but stand her in good stead. "What were you saying, Isak? Sixteen goats? There aren't more than fifteen," she said. Isak looked at her, and Oline looked back at him, straight in the face. "Aren't there sixteen goats?" he asked. "No," she said, looking at the visitors and acting helpless at his unreasonableness. "Hm," Isak said softly. He got hold of a tuft of beard with his teeth and started chewing it.

The engineer and his crew left.

If it had been important for Isak to show dissatisfaction with Oline and maybe rough her up a bit, here was a good opportunity, oh, a divine opportunity; they were again alone in the room, the boys had followed the visitors and were gone. Isak was standing in the middle of the floor and Oline was sitting by the stove. Isak cleared his throat a couple of times to let her understand he wasn't far from saying something. He remained silent, showing his strength of character. Didn't he know his own goats as well as he knew his own ten fingers, was the woman crazy! Were any of the animals he had around him and spoke to every day, such as those sixteen goats, suddenly to disappear from the cowshed? Most likely, Oline had traded off that one goat yesterday, when the wife at Breidablik was here and looked the place over. "Hm!" Isak said, on the very point of saying some more. What had Oline done? It may not have been downright murder, but something akin to it. He would speak in dead earnest about that sixteenth goat.

Isak couldn't stand there silent on the floor forever. "Hm," he said. "So, there aren't more than fifteen goats now?"—"No," Oline replied gently. "Well, you can count them yourself, I don't get more than fifteen."

Now, right this minute, he could do it: stretch out his hands and change Oline's figure considerably merely with a good grip. Yes, he could. He didn't do it, but he declared bravely as he walked to the door, "I'll say no more just now." With that he left, as though to let her know that next time there would be no lack of proper words on his part.

"Eleseus!" he called.

Where was Eleseus, what had become of his two children? Their father had something to ask them, they were big boys now and kept their eyes open. He found them under the floor of the barn, they had crawled all the way in and were invisible. They betrayed themselves by an anxious whispering. Then the two sinners came out.

It turned out that Eleseus had found a stub of colored pencil which the engineer had left behind, and when he tried to run after him to give it back, the briskly striding grownups were already a fair distance into the forest. Eleseus stopped. It occurred to him that perhaps he could keep the pencil—imagine, if he could! He got Sivert to come along, so he wouldn't have to answer for it all by himself, and they both crawled under the floor of the barn with their booty. Oh, that stub of pencil—an extraordinary thing in their lives, a miracle! They found some shavings and colored them all over with signs, and the pencil colored red with one end and blue with the other; the boys took turns using it. When their father called so loudly and urgently, Eleseus whispered, "The visitors must've come back for the pencil." Their joy was suddenly gone, swept out of their minds, and their little hearts began thumping, running wild. The brothers crawled out. Eleseus held out the pencil at arm's length to his father—here it was, they hadn't broken it, only wished they had never set eyes on it.

No engineer was to be seen. Their hearts calmed down, and the suspense was followed by a blissful feeling.

"There was a woman here yesterday," their father said. "Yes?"—"The woman here below. Did you see her leave?"—"Yes."—"Did she have a goat with her?"—"No," the boys said. "A goat?"—"She didn't have a goat with her when she went home?"—"No, what goat?"

Isak pondered and pondered. In the evening when the animals came back from the pasture he counted the goats first; there were sixteen. He counted them once more, counted them five times—there were sixteen goats. None missing.

Isak heaved a sigh of relief. But what did it all mean? Oline, that viper, hadn't known how to count to sixteen, most likely? With irritation in his voice, he told her, "What have you been driveling about, there are sixteen goats, after all?"—"Are there sixteen?" she asked innocently. "Yes."—"Well and good."—"Some head for figures you've got." Oline replied quietly, in an injured tone, "If all the goats are there, then, thank God, Oline hasn't eaten up any of them. That makes me happy on her account."

This trick of hers confused him and caused him to be off his guard. He didn't count the animals anymore; for example, it just didn't occur to him to count the sheep. Oline wasn't all that bad, of course, she kept a sort of house for him and tended his animals; only, she was so stupid that she did herself harm and not him. Let her go her own way, she wasn't worth bothering about. But for Isak life was gray and joyless under such conditions.

Years had passed. Grass had grown on the roof of the house, well, even the roof of the barn, which was several years younger, was green. The field mouse, a native of the forest, had long since gotten into the shed. There was a whirl of tits and other small birds on the farm, there were black grouse up in the hills, even magpies and crows had turned up. But the strangest thing of all happened last summer, when seagulls came up from the coast, came many, many miles up from the coast and settled on the fields there in the wilderness. The new farm was already well known to all creation! And what could Eleseus and little Sivert have thought when they saw the gulls? Ah, they were strange birds from ever so far away, not many, six in all, white, exactly alike, walking back and forth on the meadow, nibbling at the grass now and then. "Dad, what have they come here for?" the boys asked. "Because they are expecting a storm at sea," Isak answered. How strange and mysterious those gulls were!

Isak also gave his children a good deal of other useful and sound learning. They were old enough to go to school now, but the school was located in the village, miles away and out of reach. Isak had himself taught the boys their ABCs on Sundays, but he wasn't cut out for giving them any sort of higher instruction, no, that was not for this born tiller of the soil. And so the catechism and the collection of Bible stories rested quietly on the shelf beside the goat cheese. Considering how he let his children grow up, Isak must have believed that lack of book learning was to some degree a strength. They were his joy and blessing, the two of them; Isak would often remember when they were little and their mother had refused to let him lift them because he had resin on his hands. Huh, resin, the cleanest thing there was! Tar and goat milk and, say, marrow—all healthy and excellent things, too; but resin, pine resin—not a word!

So there the children were, in a paradise of dirt and ignorance; but they were handsome children when they were washed, which didn't happen very often, and little Sivert was an absolutely splendid fellow, though Eleseus was finer and deeper. "Yes, but how can the gulls know there will be a storm?" he asked. "They're weather-sick," said his father. "For that matter, nobody can be more weather-sick than a fly," he said, "however it may be, whether she gets rheumatism, becomes dizzy or what. But never try to swat a fly, for it only makes her worse," he said. "Remember that, boys! Now, the horsefly is a different sort, he dies of himself. The horsefly suddenly turns up one day in summer, and then one day he's just as suddenly gone."—"What becomes of him?" Eleseus asked. "What becomes of him? His fat hardens, so he drops dead!"

Every day more learning. When they jumped down from high rocks, they should keep their tongue well back in their mouths, to avoid getting it between their teeth. When they grew bigger and wanted to smell good for going to church, they should rub themselves with a bit of tansy, which grew on the hillside. Their father was full of wisdom. He taught the boys about stones and about flint, telling them that white stones were harder than gray ones. And when he found flint, he also had to find a knur, which he boiled in lye and made tinder of. Then he would strike a light for them. He taught them about the moon, that if they could put their left hand into it, it was waxing, and if they could put their right hand into it, then it was on the wane: "Remember that, boys!" Once in a while Isak went too far and said weird things. One day he made a remark to the effect that it was harder for a camel to enter heaven than for a human being to thread the eye of a needle. Another time, instructing them about the glory of the angels, he said they had nailed stars instead of iron plates to their heels. Good and simple teaching suitable for settlers in the wilds; the schoolmaster in the village would have smiled at it all, but Isak's boys found just about the right nourishment for their dreams in it. They were formed and trained for their own little world, what could be better? Come fall and the slaughtering season, the boys became very curious and very scared and heavyhearted because of the animals that were to die. Isak had to hold the animal with one hand and stick it with the other; Oline stirred the blood. As the old billygoat was led out, wise and whiskered, the boys were peeking around the corner. "There's an awfully cold wind this year," Eleseus said, turning away and wiping his eyes. Little Sivert cried more freely and couldn't help calling out: "Poor old billygoat!" After sticking the goat, Isak came over to the little ones and gave them the following lesson: "You should never say poor this or that and feel sorry when an animal is slaughtered. That only makes it harder to kill. Remember that!"

Thus the years went by, and now spring was on the way once more.

Inger had again written that she was doing well and learning a lot at the institution. Her baby girl was big now and was called Leopoldine, after the day she was born, November 15. She knew all sorts of things and had a special gift for sewing and crocheting; she did beautiful work, whether on cloth or canvas.

The remarkable thing about this last letter was that Inger had spelled and written it herself. Isak wasn't up to making it out by himself, but had to get the letter read at the village store. Once he had gotten it into his head, however, it stayed there; when he came home he knew it by heart.

He sat down at the end of the table with great solemnity, spread the letter out and read it to the boys. He didn't mind if Oline also noticed that he could read script fluently, but he didn't address a single word to her. When he was through he said, "There you can hear, Elseus and Sivert, it was your mother herself who wrote this letter, she has mastered all manner of learning. And that tiny little sister of yours, she knows how to do more things than all of us. Remember that!" The boys sat there in quiet wonder. "Yes, it's grand," Oline said.

What did she mean? Did she doubt Inger's truthfulness? Or was she suspicious of Isak's reading? It wasn't so easy to figure out what Oline really meant when she sat there with her meek face, weaseling. Isak decided not to pay attention to her.

"And when your mother comes home, you too will learn to write," he told the boys.

Oline moved some clothes hung up to dry by the stove, moved a pot, moved the clothes again, constantly finding something to do. Meanwhile her mind was busy. "Since it's getting to be so grand here in the woods, why didn't you buy half a pound of coffee for the house?"—"Coffee?" Isak said. He blurted it out. Oline answered back calmly, "Up to now I've bought a little bit with my own money, but . . ."

Coffee, which was a dream and a fairy tale for Isak, a rainbow! Oline was joking, of course, and he didn't get angry with her; but finally the slow-witted man remembered Oline's bartering with the Lapps, and he said angrily, "I'll buy coffee for you, all right! Did you say half a pound? You should've said a pound. There shall be plenty and to spare!"—"It's no joking matter, Isak. Nils, my brother, has coffee; at Breidablik, here below, Brede and his family have coffee."—"Yes, because they have no milk, not a drop of milk."—"Be that as it may, but you who know so much and can read script just as fast as a reindeer cow runs, you must know that coffee can be found in every home."—"Beast!" Isak said.

Then Oline sat down on her stool and refused to keep silent. "And as far as Inger is concerned," she said—"if I dare speak such big words . . ."—"You can say anything you like, I scoff at you and your words."—"She'll come home and she has learned everything. Then she'll have beads and feathers in her hat, I suppose?"—"Maybe so, yes."—"Well," Oline said, "she has me to thank a bit for all the grandeur that has come her way."—"You?" Isak asked. He couldn't contain himself. Oline replied meekly, "Since I was the humble means of her being sent away."

Isak could find nothing to say to that, all his words got stuck in his throat, he sat there staring. Did he hear rightly? Oline looked as though she hadn't said anything at all. No, in an argument Isak got lost.

He wandered out, full of dark thoughts. Oline, that vermin who lived on wickedness and grew fat from it—oh, it was probably wrong of him not to have killed her already the first year, he thought, puffing himself up. That would've shown he was a real man, he went on thinking. A real man—he? Nobody could be more terrifying.

And now a funny episode ensues. He goes into the cowshed and counts the goats. They stand there with their kids, the full number. He counts the cows, the pig, fourteen hens, two calves. "Oh, I almost forgot the sheep," he says aloud to himself; he counts the sheep, pretending he just can't wait to know if they're all there. Isak knows very well that one sheep is gone, he has known it a long time, so why act as though he doesn't? The fact is that Oline had confused him one day, lying about a missing goat, though all the goats were there. He had made a big fuss about it at the time, without getting anywhere. He never got anywhere quarreling with Oline. When the slaughtering season came around last fall, he noticed right away that a ewe was missing, but he didn't have the guts or the heart to call her to account for it immediately. He didn't have it later either.

But today he is fierce. Yes, Isak is fierce, Oline has driven him crazy. He counts the sheep again, puts his index finger on every sheep and counts aloud—let Oline hear him if she is standing outside! And, in a loud voice, he says many nasty things about Oline: that she has a completely new way of tending sheep, making one, a ewe, suddenly disappear, and that she is a first-class thief—did she understand that! Oh, just let Oline stand outside and get thoroughly frightened for once.<sup>5</sup>

He strides out of the cowshed, enters the stable and counts the horse, and from there he intends to go in—intends to go into his own house and speak his mind. He walks so fast that his work blouse stands out from his back, as though it were excited. But Oline must have noticed something from the window; walking slowly and confidently, she appears on the door slab with pails in her hands, on her way to the cowshed.

"What have you done with the ewe with the flat ears?" he asks. "The ewe?" she asks. "And if she'd been here, she would've had two lambs now. What have you done with them all? She always had two lambs. So, all in all, you've cheated me out of three sheep, do you understand that!"

Oline is completely overwhelmed, completely annihilated by the accusation; she sways her head and her legs seem to melt away under her, so she may have to take a tumble and get hurt. Meanwhile her head is scheming, her presence of mind has always protected her, always brought her booty, and it mustn't fail her this time either.

"I steal goats and I steal sheep," she says quietly. "I wonder what I do with them. I eat them up."—"You know yourself what you do."—"Hm. As if I'm not plentifully supplied with bread and meat in your service, Isak, forcing me to steal on the side? But this much I'm ready to say behind your back: in all these years I haven't found that to be necessary."—"So what has become of the ewe?"

Did you give her to Os-Anders?"—"Os-Anders?" Oline cannot help herself, she puts down her pails and folds her hands: "If only I'd been that free from sin! What ewe and lambs is it you're talking about? Is it that goat which has flat ears?"—"Beast!" says Isak, about to leave. "You're really something, Isak. Here you've got plenty of everything and animals in their stalls like a host of stars in the heavens, and yet it isn't enough for you. How can I know what sheep and what two lambs you're pressing me for? You should thank the Lord for his mercy unto the thousandth generation. Once the summer is past and we're into the winter a bit, the sheep will lamb again and you'll have three times as many as you have now."

Oh, that Oline!

Isak went away, growling like a bear. What a fool I was not to snuff her out that first day! he thought, thoroughly berating himself. What an idiot, a real horse's ass, I was! But it's not too late yet, just wait, let her go to the cowshed! It wouldn't be wise to do anything with her tonight, but tomorrow it will be. Three sheep gone! Coffee! she said.

## X

The next day was to bring a very great event: there came visitors to the farm, Geissler came. It wasn't yet summer on the moors, but Geissler didn't pay attention to the state of the trail; he came on foot, in luxurious jackboots with a wide lacquered collar. He was wearing yellow gloves and was very elegant; a man from the village carried his things.

He had come, in effect, to buy a stretch of mountain from Isak, a copper mine. What price should they set on it? By the way, he had greetings from Inger—a capable woman, popular; he was coming from Trondhjem and had spoken with her. “Isak, you’ve put in a lot of work here.”—“Oh yeah. So you’ve talked to Inger?”—“What have you got over there? You’ve built a mill, you grind your own flour? Excellent. And you’ve turned up a good amount of ground since I was here last.”—“And she was all right?”—“Yes, everything is fine. Oh, your wife? Sure, I’ll tell you all about it. But let’s go into the side room.”—“No, it hasn’t been tidied!” Oline says, trying, for various reasons, to hold them back.

They entered the room and closed the door; Oline remained in the living room and couldn’t hear anything.

Sheriff Geissler sat down and gave his knees a resounding slap: he was holding Isak’s fate in his hands. “You haven’t sold your copper mountain, have you?”—“No.”—“Good. I’ll buy it. Oh yes, I’ve spoken with Inger, with others as well. I believe she’ll soon be released, it’s up to the King now.”—“The King!”—“Yes, the King. I went to see your wife—no problem getting in for me, of course—and we had a long talk: ‘Well, Inger, you’re doing fine, really fine, aren’t you?’—‘Yes, I cannot complain.’—‘Are you homesick?’—‘Sure, I can’t deny it.’—‘You’ll soon be home,’ I said. And I can tell you this much, Isak, she’s quite a woman, Inger is, no tears; on the contrary, she smiled and laughed—by the way, her mouth has been operated and sewed up again. ‘Goodbye,’ I said to her, ‘you won’t be here for very long now, take my word for it!’

“Then I went to the warden, who couldn’t very well refuse to see me. ‘You’ve got a woman here who should be out and at home,’ I said, ‘Inger Sellanrå.’—‘Inger?’ he said, ‘oh yes, she’s a good person. I would be pleased to keep her for twenty more years,’ he said. ‘That’s not going to happen,’ I said, ‘she’s been here too long already.’—‘Too long?’ he said. ‘Are you familiar with the case?’—‘I’m thoroughly familiar with the case, I was her sheriff.’—‘Please, sit down!’ he then said—about time too! ‘Well, we’re doing all we can for Inger here,’ the warden said, ‘and for her little girl, too,’ he said. ‘So, the woman is from your part of the country? We’ve helped her get a sewing machine of her own. She has completed her apprenticeship in the workshop, and we’ve taught her a good deal; she has learned regular weaving and home crafts, dyeing, and cutting. She has been here for too long, you say?’ I knew what I should answer, of course, but I wanted to put it off, so I just said, ‘Yes, her case has been handled very badly, it will have to be reopened; now, after the revision of the penal code, she might have been acquitted altogether. She was sent a hare when she was expecting.’—‘A hare?’ the warden asked. ‘A hare,’ I said. ‘And the child was born with a harelip.’ The warden smiled and said, ‘Oh, I see. So, in your opinion, this factor wasn’t taken sufficiently into account?’—‘No,’ I said, ‘it wasn’t even mentioned.’—‘Well, that’s not of very great consequence, is it?’—‘The consequences for her were serious enough.’—‘Do you believe that a hare can perform miracles?’ he asked. ‘Whether a hare can perform miracles or not,’ I replied, ‘I won’t discuss just now. The question is how the sight of the hare, under those circumstances, may have affected the victim, a harelipped woman.’ He thought this over for a while. ‘All right,’ he said. ‘But in this institution, you see, our sole concern is to receive the convicted parties, we do not revise the sentences. According to her sentence, Inger has not been here for too long.’

“At that point I broached what simply had to be said: ‘A mistake was made when Inger Sellanrå was admitted.’—‘A mistake?’—‘First of all, she shouldn’t have been taken away in the condition she was in.’ The warden looked fixedly at me. ‘No, that’s true,’ he said. ‘However, that’s not something for us, in this prison, to worry about.’—‘Secondly,’ I said, ‘she shouldn’t have served two months of her sentence before her condition became evident to the prison authorities.’ That hit home, the warden maintained a long silence. ‘Are you authorized to act on the woman’s behalf?’ he asked. ‘Yes,’ I said. ‘As I’ve indicated, we’re pleased with Inger here and treat her accordingly,’ the warden gabbled on, again enumerating everything they had taught her; they had even taught her how to write, he said. And that little daughter of hers they had put out to nurse with decent people, and so forth. I explained the circumstances in Inger’s home: two little ones, with hired help to groom and look after them, and so on. ‘I have a statement from her husband,’ I said, ‘it can be attached if the case is reopened or an application is made for pardon.’—‘Let me have that statement,’ the warden said. ‘I’ll bring it tomorrow during visiting hours,’ I replied.”

Isak sat and listened, it was soul-stirring, a fairy tale from foreign lands. He followed the movements of Geissler’s lips with the eyes of a slave.

Geissler continued: “I went back to my hotel and wrote out a statement; I made the case my own business and signed it ‘Isak Sellanrå.’ But don’t imagine I wrote a single word about the prison authorities having done anything wrong. Didn’t mention it. The next day I brought the document. ‘Please have a seat,’ the warden said directly. He read my statement, nodding now and then, and ended by saying, ‘Excellent. It doesn’t lend itself to reopening the case, but . . .’—‘Yes, it does, with a supplementary document which I also have,’ I said, and that also hit home. The warden hastened to say, ‘I have considered the matter since yesterday and find there is good reason to submit an application for Inger.’—‘Which you, in your capacity as warden, would support?’ I asked. ‘I will recommend it, recommend it warmly.’ I bowed and said, ‘Then the pardon is assured. I thank you on behalf of an unfortunate woman and an abandoned home.’—‘I don’t think we’ll bother with obtaining any statement from her native district,’ the warden said, ‘you know her,



after all.' I understood well enough why it was to be done quietly, so to speak, and answered, 'Statements from home would only delay the matter.'

"There you've got the whole story, Isak." Geissler looked at his watch. "And now to the matter in hand. Can you come with me up to the copper mountain again?"

Isak, that rock or log of a man, couldn't immediately change the subject; steeped in thought and wonder, he began to ask questions. He was told that the application had gone to the King and might be decided in one of the upcoming cabinet meetings. "It's a miracle!" Isak said.

They went up into the mountains, Geissler, his companion and Isak, and were away for a few hours. During this brief period Geissler followed the course of the copper vein over a long stretch of mountain and staked out the boundaries of the area he wanted to buy. He was a scatterbrain. But the man was not dumb, his quick judgment was remarkably unerring.

When he got back to the farm—again with a bagful of fresh stone samples—he took out writing materials and sat down to write. But he didn't just write and write, nonstop, he also chatted occasionally. "Well, Isak, you won't get big money for your mountain this time, but you can have a couple of hundred dollars." Then he wrote again. "Remember to remind me that I want to take a look at your mill before I leave," he said. Noticing some blue and red streaks on the loom, he asked, "Who has drawn that?" Oh, that was Elseus, who had used his colored pencil to draw a horse and a billygoat on the loom and other woodwork because he didn't have paper. "It's not bad at all!" Geissler said and gave Elseus a quarter.

Then Geissler wrote for a while again and said, "Surely it won't be long before more homesteaders come up here and settle in the wilds, eh?" To that his companion remarked, "They've already started coming."—"Who?"—"First, there's the place they call Breidablik, Brede at Breidablik."—"Oh, him!" Geissler snorted contemptuously. "Well, a couple of others have also bought land."—"If only they are good for something!" Geissler said. Noting just then that there were two small boys in the room, he got hold of little Sivert and gave him also a quarter. A strange fellow, that Geissler! By now, however, his eyes had started to look sore, they were kind of red at the edges. It could be from staying awake at night; at times it happens as a result of strong drink. But he didn't give the impression of being despondent; while he was talking about this and that, he was no doubt thinking about the document in front of him all along, for suddenly he would pick up his pen and write another piece.

Now he appeared to be finished.

He turned to Isak: "Well, as I said, you won't get rich from this deal. But there may be more to come. We'll put it in such a way that you'll get more later. But two hundred you can have right now."

Isak understood very little of the whole thing, but two hundred dollars was in any case another miracle and a steep sum. He would get it only on paper, not paid in cash naturally, but let that pass. Having other things on his mind, Isak asked, "And you're convinced that she'll be pardoned?"—"Your wife? If there had been a telegraph in the area," Geissler replied, "I would've wired Trondhjem and inquired if she hasn't already been released." Isak had heard talk about the telegraph, it was a wonderful thing, a wire on tall poles, something out of this world. Starting to feel distrustful of Geissler's big words, he demurred, "But what if the King refuses?"—"In that case," Geissler answered, "I'll send in my supplementary document, which will contain everything. And then your wife *shall* be free. You mustn't have any doubts about that."

Then he read aloud what he had written, the sales contract for the mountain—two hundred dollars cash down and subsequently a nice high percentage should mining operations get started or the copper find possibly be sold. "Sign your name here!" Geissler said.

Isak would have signed immediately, but he was no writer, having all his life only cut letters in wood. Oh, but there stood that vile creature Oline, watching, and so he grabbed the pen, this scary feather-light thing, turned the right end down and *wrote*— wrote his name. Afterward Geissler made an addition, presumably an explanation, and his companion signed as witness.

Finished.

But Oline was still standing motionless; indeed, it was only now that she froze. What was going to happen?

"Dinner on the table, Oline!" Isak said, acting a bit high and mighty, perhaps, after having inscribed his name on paper. "Such as we can offer strangers," he said to Geissler.

"I can smell good meat and soup," Geissler said. "Now look here, Isak, here's your money." Geissler took out his wallet, big and fat, pulled out two bundles of bills, counted them and put them on the table: "Count it over yourself!"

Silence. Quiet.

"Well. Uh, all right," Isak replied; his breath taken away, he mumbled, "It's not as if I've asked for it—after everything you've done."—"There are ten tens, and *there* twenty fives," Geissler said shortly. "I hope there will be much more for you some day."

Then Oline came back to herself again. The miracle had happened. She set the food on the table.

The following morning Geissler went over to the stream to look at the mill. It was all so small and so crudely done, as though it were a mill for the hill folk, but strong and serviceable for people. Isak took his guest a little farther upriver and showed him another fall he had already done some work on; that would be for a small sawmill—if God kept him in good health. "My only worry is that the school is so far away," he said, "I'll have to find lodgings for the boys in the village." The quick-thinking Geissler didn't see any great difficulty in that. "Right now more and more settlers are coming into the area, which means there will be a school

district.”—“That’s not likely to happen until my little ones are grown up.”—“What if you do find a place for them in the village? You drive down with the boys and provisions and pick them up again in three weeks, six weeks, would that be a problem for you?”—“No,” Isak said.

No, indeed. Nothing was really a problem now that Inger would come home. He had a house and land and food and good things, big money too, and an iron constitution. Oh, what a constitution, vigorous and unwithered in every way, a real man’s constitution.

When Geissler had left, Isak began to ponder many presumptuous things. For at the end Geissler, bless him, had said some encouraging words, namely, that he would send Isak a message quite soon—when he got to a telegraph. “You can inquire at the post office in a couple of weeks,” he said. That alone was great news, and Isak began to make a seat for his cart. A seat to be taken off when carting manure, naturally, but to be put in again for carrying people. When he had finished the seat, it looked so white and new that it should really be painted darker. For that matter, what shouldn’t have been done! The whole place should be painted. And hadn’t he for years had in mind to build a large barn, with a bridge for carting in the hay on? And hadn’t he thought of getting the sawmill ready soon, fencing in his home fields, and building a boat up at the mountain lake? He had thought of doing so many things. But it was no use. Even if he’d had the strength of thousands, *time* would be too short. Sunday came before he knew it, and in a little while it was Sunday again.

But in any case he wanted to paint, that was for sure. The buildings stood there so gray and naked, as though in their shirt sleeves. There was still time before the work season, the spring had barely begun; the goats and sheep had been let out, but there was frost in the ground everywhere.

He goes to the village, taking along a few dozen eggs to sell, and comes back with paint. There was enough for one building, the barn, which he painted red. He fetches more paint, yellow ochre for the farmhouse. “Hm, it’ll be real grand, as I’ve always said,” Oline mutters every day. Oh, Oline must have understood that her time at Sellanrå would soon be over; she was tough and strong enough to take it, but not without bitterness. Isak, on his part, didn’t call her to account anymore, though she had embezzled and stolen a good deal lately. Isak gave her a year-old ram, for she had, after all, been with him for a long time at low pay. And besides, Oline hadn’t been that bad with the children; she wasn’t strict and honest and such, but she had a way with children, listened to what they said and let them do pretty much as they pleased. If they came around when she was making cheese, she gave them a bit to taste; if they begged her of a Sunday to be let off washing their faces, she would let them off.

When the buildings had been primed, Isak went to the village to buy all the paint he could carry, and that wasn’t little. He applied three coats and painted windows and corners white. When he now came home from the village and saw his home on the hillside, he saw a fairy-tale castle. The wilderness had become inhabited and was unrecognizable, a blessing had befallen it, life had arisen from a long dream, there were human beings living there, children were running around by the buildings. And the forest stretched away, large and friendly, right up to the blue heights.

But the last time Isak went to fetch paint, the storekeeper gave him a blue letter with a coat of arms on it; it cost five cents. The letter was a telegram, which had been forwarded by mail; it was from Geissler. God bless that Geissler, what a wonderful man he was! The few words of his telegram read: “Inger free, home very soon. Geissler.” It made the country store spin for Isak, and the counter and the people receded into the distance. He felt rather than heard himself saying, “Thank the Lord!”—“She may be here as early as tomorrow,” the shopkeeper said, “if she left Trondhjem soon enough.”—“Oh,” Isak said.

He waited until the following day. The boat which brought the mail from the steamship stop did come, to be sure, but no Inger. “Then she won’t come till next week,” the storekeeper said.

It was just as well that Isak gained time, he had so much to do. Should he forget everything and neglect his land? He goes home and begins carting out the manure. That’s quickly done. Probing the fields with a pry, he follows the passing of the ground frost from day to day. The sun is big and strong, the snow is gone, everything is turning green; and the cattle have been turned out. One day Isak plows, a few days later he sows grain and plants potatoes. Ho, the boys plant potatoes like angels, they have blessed little hands and easily get the better of their father.

Then Isak washes the cart at the stream and puts in the seat. He talks to the boys about taking a trip to the village. “Yes, but aren’t you going to walk?” they ask. “No, I’ve taken it into my head to go down with horse and cart today.”—“Can’t we come with you?”—“You must be nice boys and stay home this time. Your mother will be coming any moment now, and she’ll teach you many things.” Elseus is eager to learn and asks, “When you write on paper, what does it feel like?”—“It feels like almost nothing,” the father answers, “just like being empty-handed.”—“But doesn’t he slip, like on the ice?”—“Who?”—“The pen you write with?”—“Uh-huh. Well, you have to learn to steer him.”

Little Sivert was a different sort, he didn’t even mention the pen; he simply wanted to get a ride, to sit on the seat and say gee-up to an unhitched cart and drive terribly fast. It was because of him that both boys got a long ride with their father down the road.

## XI

Isak drives until he gets to a bog hole, where he stops. A bog hole, its bottom black, its little surface motionless. Isak knew what it was good for, he had scarcely used any other mirror in his life than such a bog hole. He is exquisitely dressed in a red shirt today, and now he picks up a pair of scissors and trims his beard. Was the vain water troll going to part with his five-year-old iron beard and make himself downright elegant? He cuts and cuts and looks in the mirror. He could, of course, have done the job at home this morning, but he was embarrassed because of Oline; putting on a red shirt directly under her nose was as far as he would go. He cuts and cuts, and a good amount of beard falls onto the mirror. When the horse refuses to stand still any longer, he interrupts and declares himself finished. And, sure enough, he does feel younger, sort of, the devil knew why—sort of slimmer. Then he drives on to the village.

The next day the packet boat arrives. Isak shows up on a crag near the storekeeper's warehouse to be on the lookout, but no Inger is to be seen now either. Good Lord, there were several passengers, both grownups and children, but no Inger. Staying in the background, he had sat down on this crag, but now there was no reason why he should remain there any longer, so he went over to the boat. Crates, barrels, people and mail continued to be brought ashore by the eight-oared boat, but Isak didn't see his folks. On the other hand, he did see a woman with a little girl who was already standing by the door to the boatshed, but the woman was better-looking than Inger, though Inger was not ugly. What—but it *was* Inger. "Hm!" Isak said, lumbering forward. They greeted each other, she holding out her hand and saying hello, a trace of a cold in her voice and pale after the seasickness and the voyage. Isak just stood there, till he finally said, "Uh, the weather turned out nicely anyway."—"I saw you already over there, but I didn't want to push forward," Inger said. "So you're down in the village today?" she asked. "Yes. Hm."—"You're all doing well?"—"Yes, thanks for asking."—"This is Leopoldine, she's been much braver than I on the trip. This is your dad, go and say hello to your dad, Leopoldine."—"Hm," Isak said, as he was doing all the time; he acted so peculiar, like a stranger among them. "If you see a sewing machine down by the boat," Inger said, "it's mine. And I also have a trunk." Isak hurried off, more than willingly; the crew pointed out the trunk to him, but Inger herself had to go down and hunt up the sewing machine. It was a nice box of an unfamiliar shape, with a round roof and a handle for carrying it. A sewing machine in this part of the country! Isak picked up the trunk and the sewing machine and looked at his family. "I'll run up quickly with these things and come back for her," he said. "For whom?" Inger asked, smiling. "Don't you think the big girl can walk?"

They went up to the horse and cart. "Have you got yourself a new horse?" Inger said. "And a cart with a seat too?"—"To be sure. Come to think of it, would you like a bite to eat? I've brought some food."—"Let's wait till we get into the brush," she replied. "What do you say, Leopoldine, can you sit by yourself?" Her father won't allow that: "No, she could fall down on the wheels. Get in with her and drive yourself."

They drove off and Isak followed behind.

He was watching the two of them in the cart. There was Inger, looking like a stranger and unfamiliarly dressed, elegant, without a harelip, only with a red streak on her upper lip. She didn't hiss anymore, curiously enough, she spoke clearly. A gray and red woolen kerchief with fringes looked gorgeous on her dark hair. Turning around in the cart, she said, "It would've been nice if you'd brought a sheepskin, it may get cold for the child as the evening wears on."—"I'll let her have my jacket," Isak said, "and when we get into the woods, a sheepskin I left there is waiting."—"Oh, you've got a sheepskin up in the woods?"—"Well, I didn't want to take it all the way, in case you shouldn't have arrived today."—"I see. What did you tell me—are the boys doing well too?"—"Yes, thanks for asking."—"They're big fellows now, I figure?"—"Yes, that's for sure. They've just planted the potatoes."—"Oh," the mother said, smiling and swaying her head, "can they plant potatoes already?"—"Elseus reaches me to here and Sivert to here," Isak said, measuring on himself.

Little Leopoldine began asking for something to eat. Oh, what a pretty little creature, a ladybug on a cart! Her speech was like a song, an incredible language from Trondhjem; her father had to get it translated now and then. She had the same features as the boys, the brown eyes and oval cheeks, which all three had gotten from their mother; they were their mother's children, which was a good thing. Isak was a bit shy with his little girl, shy about her tiny shoes and her long thin woolen stockings and short dress; when she met her strange dad, she had curtsied and given him a wee little hand.

When they came into the woods they stopped for a rest; everyone had a bite to eat, the horse was fed, and Leopoldine ran around in the heather with food in her hand. "You haven't changed much," Inger said, looking at her husband. Isak glanced aside and replied, "Oh, you think so? But you've become so grand."—"Ha-ha, no, I'm an old woman now," she said jestingly. There was no denying it, Isak couldn't summon up any confidence but continued to be reserved, as if he were ashamed. How old was his wife? She couldn't be less than thirty—that is, she couldn't possibly be more. And although Isak was eating, he pulled up a sprig of heather and started chewing on that too. "What—do you eat heather?" Inger cried, laughing. Isak tossed the heather away, put food into his mouth, and went over to the horse and lifted its forepart off the ground. Inger observed this incident with amazement, seeing the horse standing on two legs. "What are you doing that for?" she asked. "He's so good-natured," he said and set the horse down again. What had he done it for, indeed? He probably felt a powerful urge to do it. Maybe he was trying to hide his own embarrassment that way.

Then they started off again, all three going on foot for a while. They came to a new farm. "What's that?" Inger asked. "That's Brede's place, he's bought it."—"Brede?"—"And it's called Breidablik. There are broad moors but not much timberland." They

talked more about it when they had passed Breidablik. Isak noticed that Brede's cart had been left out in the open.

But now the child was getting sleepy, and her father took her gently on his arm and carried her. They walked and walked, and soon Leopoldine went to sleep. "Listen," Inger said, "let's wrap her in the sheepskin and put her in the cart, then she can sleep as much as she wants."—"She'll be so jolted," says her father, who wants to carry her. They cross the moors and get into the woods again. "Whoa!" Inger says. She stops the horse, takes the child from Isak, and asks him to move the trunk and the sewing machine so Leopoldine can lie on the bottom of the cart. "She won't be jolted at all, what nonsense is that!" Isak takes care of everything, wraps the sheepskin around his little daughter and places his jacket under her head. Then they drive on.

Man and wife talk about different things. The sun is up till late in the evening and the weather is warm. "Where does Oline sleep?" Inger asks. "In the side room."—"I see. And the boys?"—"Well, they lie in their own bed in the front room. There are two beds in the front room, just as when you went away."—"Looking at you now, I can see you're just as you were before," Inger says. "Your shoulders have carried many a load up through this waste-land, but they haven't grown any weaker from it."—"Well, no. But come to think, have you been getting along fairly well all these years?" Isak felt so tenderhearted that he asked this question, mauding. Inger replied that, yes, she couldn't complain.

Their conversation having turned emotional, Isak asked if she felt tired of walking and would rather ride. "No, thanks," she said. "But I can't understand what's going on with me; after I got rid of the seasickness I'm hungry all the time."—"Do you want a bite of something?"—"Yes. If it wouldn't waste too much time." Oh, that Inger, she probably wasn't very hungry herself, but she wished Isak could eat again; he had spoiled his last meal so with that sprig of heather.

And since the evening was warm and light and they still had a good six miles to go, they sat down to eat again.

Inger took a parcel out of her trunk and said, "I've got a few things with me for the little fellows. Let's go over to those bushes, where it's sunny." When they were settled there, she showed him the things, pretty suspenders with buckles for the boys, copy books with samples in them, a pencil for each, a clasp knife too. For herself she had brought an excellent book—"look, here's my name in it, a prayer book." She had received it from the warden in remembrance. Isak admired each thing, speaking softly. She showed him some small collars that belonged to Leopoldine and gave Isak a big neckerchief, shiny as silk. "Is this for me?" he asked. "Yes, it is." Isak handled it gingerly and stroked it. "Do you think it's pretty?"—"Pretty, oh yeah! I could go around the world in this!" But his fingers were so rough, they stuck to the unusual silken fabric.

And now Inger had no more things to show, but when she packed up she sat in such a way that she displayed her legs, her red-striped stockings. "Hm. Those are city stockings, aren't they?" he asked. "Well, it's city yarn, but I made them myself—knitted them, as we used to say. The stockings are very high, to above the knee, look. . . ." A moment later she heard herself whisper, "You—you're the same—the same as ever!"

A while later they drive on, with Inger riding and holding the reins. "I've also brought some coffee in a paper bag," she says, "but you can't taste it this evening, because it hasn't been roasted."—"You shouldn't bother," he replies.

An hour later the sun has set and it is growing chilly. Inger wants to get off and walk. They both wrap the sheepskin more tightly around Leopoldine and smile to see how long she can sleep. Then man and wife again chat as they walk on. It's a pleasure to hear Inger talk, nobody could speak more clearly than she does now.

"We have four cows, don't we?" she asks. "Oh no, we have more now," he replies proudly, "we now have eight."—"Eight cows!"—"Well, if we count the bullock."—"Have you been selling butter?"—"Yes. Eggs, too."—"Do we have chickens also?"—"Sure. And a pig." Now and again Inger gets so surprised that she forgets herself and stops for a moment, "Whoa!" And Isak is proud and keeps on trying to overwhelm her. "Geissler," he says, "well, you remember Geissler? He dropped by a while back."—"Yeah?"—"He bought a copper mountain from me."—"Oh, what's that? A copper mountain, you say?"—"Copper, sure. It lies up in the mountains, all along the north side of the lake."—"I see. But this wasn't anything you got money for, was it?"—"Heavens, yes. He's not the sort of man who wouldn't pay."—"What did you get?"—"Hm. You won't believe it, two hundred dollars."—"Which you got?" Inger cries, stopping for a moment again, "Whoa."—"Which I got. And the farm was paid for a long time ago," Isak said. "Oh, you're incredible!"

It certainly was a pleasure to see Inger all surprised and to make her a rich wife, and so Isak added that he didn't owe anything at the store either, nor anywhere else. And he didn't only have Geissler's two hundred dollars in his coffer, but more than that, a hundred and sixty dollars more. So they couldn't ever thank God enough.

They talked more about Geissler; Inger was able to inform him about Geissler's efforts for her release. Evidently it hadn't gone very smoothly for him, he had kept at it for a long time and seen the warden more than once. Geissler had also written to the cabinet ministers or some other higher-ups, but that he did behind the warden's back, and when the warden learned about it, he was scandalized and lost his temper, as was to be expected. But that didn't frighten Geissler, who demanded a new hearing and a new court and everything. But then the King had to sign.

Geissler, the former sheriff, had always been good to them both, and they had often wondered why; he had done everything for a mere thank-you, it was puzzling. Inger had talked to him in Trondhjem, but without being able to figure him out. "He doesn't care about anyone in the parish but us," she explained. "He said that?"—"Yes. He's furious with the whole parish. He would show the parish, he said."—"Hm."—"And they would be sorry they'd lost him, he said."

When they reached the edge of the forest, they saw their home ahead of them. There were more buildings than before, and the buildings were nicely painted. Inger didn't recognize the place and stopped short. "You won't tell me it's there—that this is our place!" she exclaimed.

Little Leopoldine woke at last and sat up, fully rested; she was helped off so she could walk. "Is that where we're going?" she asked. "Yes, isn't it pretty?"

A couple of small figures were moving about over by the buildings. They were Elseus and Sivert watching out; now they came running up. Inger felt a sudden chill, a cold in the head with fits of coughing that even affected her eyes, which were watering. "One catches colds so easily on board. Did you ever see the likes, eyes tearing and all wet from a cold!"

But when the boys came closer, they suddenly stopped running and simply stared. They had forgotten how their mother looked, and they had never seen their little sister. And Dad—him they didn't recognize until he came real close. He had cut off his big beard.

## XII

Now all is well.

Isak sows his oats, harrows and rolls the field. Little Leopoldine comes and wants to have a ride. But to sit on a roller—no, she's too small and so unfamiliar with it all; her brothers know better: Daddy's roller doesn't have a seat.

But Daddy thinks it's fun to have little Leopoldine come around, and he is pleased about her being already so trusting; he talks to her and asks her to walk nicely in the fields, so she won't get her shoes full of dirt. "And look—if it isn't a blue dress you're wearing today! Let me see, certainly, it's blue. With a belt and all. Do you remember the big ship you came here on? Did you see the engines? Well, now you must go home to the boys, then you'll all think of something to do."

Since Oline left, Inger has stepped into her old chores in the house and the cowshed. She may overdo it a bit as far as cleanliness and order go, to show that she intended to find a better way of doing things, but it was wonderful to see the great difference it made; even the windowpanes in the turf cowshed were now washed and the stalls swept.

But this was only the first few days, the first week; later she began to slack off. In reality, it wasn't necessary with all those frills in the cowshed, her time could be put to better use. Inger had learned so much in the city, and that learning ought to benefit her in some way. She again started using her spinning wheel and her loom, at which, incidentally, she had become even more deft and quick, a little too quick, whee, especially when Isak was watching; he didn't understand how anybody could learn to use her fingers that way, those fine long fingers on her large hand. Suddenly, though, Inger would leave one job and do something else. Of course, she had more things to take care of now and was more quick-minded; but also, perhaps, she wasn't quite as patient as before, a bit of restlessness having seen a chance to creep in.

First of all, there were the flowers she had brought home with her, tubers and cuttings, little lives that also demanded attention. The window became too small, the ledge too narrow to put flowerpots on; she didn't even have a pot, and Isak had to make tiny little boxes for begonia, fuchsia and roses. And besides, one window was not enough; who had ever heard of a room with only one window!

"And come to think of it," Inger said, "I don't have a pressing iron either. I could use a flatiron to press with when I sew dresses and things; nobody can be a fully qualified seamstress without an iron of some sort."

Isak promised to get the blacksmith in the village to forge a first-rate pressing iron. Oh, Isak was ready to do anything, was always ready to do what Inger demanded, for he understood enough to know that she had learned a lot and was without an equal. Her speech, too, had become different, a little better, studied. She never called him anymore using her old words, "Come in and eat!" Now she said, "Please, dinner is served!" Everything had changed. In the old days he had at most answered with a "Yes!" and gone on working a goodly while before going in; now he answered "Thank you!" and went at once. Love makes the wise man foolish—sometimes Isak answered "Many thanks!" Yes, indeed, everything had become different now, and wasn't it getting to be a trifle too refined? When Isak said *dung*, speaking a farmer's mother tongue, Inger said *fertilizer*, "for the sake of the children."

She took pains with the children and taught them everything, helping them make progress; tiny Leopoldine quickly improved her crocheting and the boys their penmanship and knowledge, so they wouldn't come to the village school unprepared. Eleseus, in particular, had become very knowledgeable, but to tell the truth, little Sivert was no great shakes, just a rascal, a madcap; he even ventured to turn some screws on Mama's sewing machine and had already cut slivers off chairs and tables with the clasp knife he'd been given. He was now living under a threat of being deprived of his knife.

Besides, the children had all the farm animals, and Eleseus had the colored pencil to boot. He used it rather carefully and was reluctant to lend it to his brother, but in the long run, of course, drawings still appeared on every wall, and the pencil was getting dangerously diminished. Eventually, Eleseus felt obliged to put Sivert on a ration and simply lend him the pencil for a drawing every Sunday. This was not in accord with Sivert's own wish, but Eleseus was not someone you could negotiate with. Not that Eleseus was stronger exactly, but he had longer arms and could swing at him better during their disagreements.

But that Sivert! Now and then he would find a ptarmigan's nest in the woods, once he made himself interesting by telling about a mousehole, and another time about a trout in the stream the size of a man; but it was all sheer invention. Sivert couldn't always resist turning black into white, but was a good fellow otherwise. When the cat had kittens, he was the one who brought her milk, as she hissed too much for Eleseus, and Sivert would stand tirelessly looking down into the unquiet box, that home swarming with paws.

And what about the chickens which he observed every day, the rooster with his stallion breast and his splendor, and the hens that chattered and picked sand or suddenly cried, badly injured after laying an egg.

And there was the big ram. Little Sivert was now widely read compared to before, but he didn't know enough to say about the ram, "Heavens, what a Roman nose he's got!" No, he didn't. But Sivert knew something better: he had been close to the ram when it was a lamb, understood it and was one with it, a relation, a fellow creature. At one time a mysterious, primeval impression had flickered through his senses, it was a moment he would never forget: grazing in the field, the ram suddenly shot up its head and stopped chewing, just stood there looking. Sivert looked instinctively in the same direction—no, nothing unusual. But then Sivert himself felt something unusual inside him: It's almost as if he stands there looking into the Garden of Eden, he thought.

And there were the cows, of which the children had a couple each, large sailing animals so gentle and good-natured that they could be caught up with and patted at any moment by these little humans. And there was the pig, white and correct in his manner if it was properly cared for, listening to all sounds, a comedian crazy about food and as ticklish and jittery as a girl. And there was the billygoat—there was always an old billygoat at Sellanrå; when one lost his life, another took his place. How billygoat-like could the face of a billygoat be! These days he had many goats to mind, but sometimes he got sick and tired of the whole company and lay down, long-bearded and ruminative, a father Abraham. But suddenly he would get to his feet again and amble after the goats. He left a wave of acrid smell in his wake.

Daily life on the farm takes its course. When a wanderer passes by once in a while on his way across the mountain and asks, “You’re doing all right, are you?” Isak and Inger reply, “Why, yes, and thank you for asking.”

Isak works and works; he consults the almanac in everything he does, looks out for the changes of the moon, goes by the weather signs and works. He has made a sort of road down through the brush, good enough for driving to the village with a horse and cart; but mostly he prefers to carry the loads himself—goat cheese or hides, birch bark and butter and eggs, all of it articles that he sells so he can buy other things that he needs. In the summertime he doesn’t often drive, partly because the road from Breidablik on down is so neglected. He has asked Brede Olsen to help him with the road, and Brede has promised to do so but never kept his word. Isak won’t nag him about it anymore. Instead he carries the loads on his own back, provoking Inger to remark, “I just don’t understand you, how you can take it all!” Oh yes, he could take it all. He had a pair of boots that were incredibly thick and heavy, their soles covered with iron plates and their straps fastened with rivets. The very fact that an individual could walk in such boots was remarkable.

During one of his excursions to the village, he runs across several work crews on the moors building stone sockets and erecting telegraph poles. Some of them are from the village. Brede Olsen is also a member of the party, although he has settled here and is supposed to do farming. That he has time for it! Isak must be thinking.

The inspector asks Isak if he would like to sell telegraph poles. No. Not if he’s well paid? No. Isak had become a bit quicker, he was better at speaking his mind. If he did sell some poles, he would have a little more money, a few extra dollars, but no timber, so what was the advantage? The engineer himself comes up and repeats the request, but Isak refuses. “We have poles aplenty,” the engineer says, “but it would be easier to take them in your part of the woods and save the long transport.”—“I don’t have enough logs and timber for my own use,” Isak says, “I should get up a small mill for myself and do some sawing; I don’t have a grain loft, I lack housing.”

At this point Brede Olsen butts in and says, “If I were you, Isak, I would sell the poles.” Isak, a very forbearing man, sent Brede a sharp glance as he replied, “I can well believe that.”—“Well?” Brede asked. “But I’m not you,” Isak said.

Some of the workers snickered a bit at this reply.

To be sure, Isak had a special reason to put his neighbor down a bit today, he had just seen three sheep in the pasture at Breidablik, and one of them Isak recognized, the one with the flat ears which Oline had bartered away. Let Brede keep the sheep, he thought as he went on his way, let Brede and his wife be flush with sheep!

And he also had the sawmill in mind at all times, that was true enough; he had already brought home the large circular blade on last winter’s snow, as well as the necessary fittings that the storekeeper had supplied him with from Trondhjem. These machine parts were now lying in his shed, coated with linseed oil to prevent rusting. Some of the logs for the framework he had also hauled up, so he could start building at any time, but he had postponed it. He didn’t understand why. Had he begun to wear out, to decline? It would be no wonder to others, but to him it was completely incredible. Had he become lightheaded? He had never shrunk from doing a job before, he must have changed since the time he built the gristmill over a waterfall that was just as big. He could get help in the village, but would try to go it alone again, get started one of these days; Inger would lend him a hand.

He mentioned it to Inger. “Hm. I wonder if you could find the time one of these days to lend a hand with that sawmill.” Inger thought it over: “Certainly, if I can fit it in. So, you’re going to build a sawmill?”—“That’s what I mean to do, yeah. I’ve worked it all out in my head.”—“Will it be harder to do than the gristmill?”—“Much harder, ten times as hard,” he bragged. “Bless me, here everything has to fit together down to the tiniest little line, and the circular blade goes in the middle.”—“If only you can manage it!” Inger said in her thoughtlessness. Isak felt hurt at those words and answered, “We shall see.”—“Couldn’t you get an experienced man to help you?” she asked. “No.”—“Well, then you won’t manage,” she said, persisting.

Isak slowly raised his hand up to his hair, like a bear raising his paw. “That’s just what I’ve been afraid of, that I wouldn’t manage it,” he said, “and so I wanted you who understand it all to lend me a hand,” he said. There the bear made a hit, to be sure, though it didn’t turn out to be a victory. Inger grew stubborn and, tossing her head, refused to help with the sawmill. “I see,” Isak said. “Huh, I have to stand wet in the middle of the river and get sick, is that it? And who will sew on the machine, tend the animals and do the housekeeping and all?”—“Forget it,” Isak said.

It was only the four corner posts and the two middle posts on both long walls he would have liked some help with, no more. Had Inger deep down become that weird during her long stay in the city?

As a matter of fact, Inger was greatly changed and no longer thought so constantly about their common good as about herself. She had started using her combing cards and spinning wheel and loom, but she greatly preferred turning her sewing machine, and after the blacksmith had forged a pressing iron for her, she was fully equipped to set up shop as a skilled seamstress. It was her profession. To begin with, she sewed a couple of dresses for Leopoldine; Isak thought they were pretty and praised them a little too much perhaps.

Inger hinted that it was nothing to what she could do. "But they are too short," Isak said. "We wore them that way in town," Inger replied, "you don't know anything about it." Evidently, Isak had gone too far, and so he held out a prospect of getting some sort of material for Inger herself. "For a coat?" Inger asked. "Yes, or whatever you'd like." Inger agreed to his getting her the coat material and described what it should be like.

But when she had sewn the coat, she had to find someone to show it off to, and so she went with the boys to the village when they were taken to school. And this trip was not made to no purpose, it left its mark.

First, they drove past Breidablik, where the wife and children came out and watched the travelers. There Inger and the two boys were driving along like gentry, and the boys were on their way to a real school, and Inger was wearing a coat. A snake slithered through the wife at Breidablik seeing this; she could dispense with the coat, she wasn't vain, thank God. But she herself had children: Barbro, a big girl; Helge, the next eldest; and Katrine, all of school age. Naturally, the two eldest had already been to school in the village, but when the family moved into the moors, up to this remote Breidablik, the children couldn't avoid becoming heathens again.

"Have you brought food for your boys?" the woman asked. "Food? Well, don't you see this trunk? That's my traveling trunk, which I brought home with me, it's crammed with food."—"What do you have?"—"What I have? I have pork and meat for hot food, and bread and butter and cheese for dry food."—"Well, you're real swells up there in the back country!" the woman said, and her poor, pale-faced children heard both with their eyes and ears about all that good food. "Where are you going to find lodgings for them?" she asked. "At the blacksmith's."—"I see," said the woman. "Mine, too, are going back to school, they'll be staying at the sheriff's."—"Oh," Inger said. "Or at the doctor's or the parson's. Brede, you see, knows all the big shots." Then Inger adjusted her coat, displaying some silk fringes to advantage. "Where did you buy your coat?" the woman asks. "Did you bring it home with you?"—"I've sewn it myself."—"Well, I'll say it again, you're bursting with money and might up your way!"

When Inger drove on, she felt stuck-up and glad, and when she got to the village she may have shown herself a bit too snooty; in any case, Sheriff Heyerdahl's wife took offense at her appearing in a coat: the wife at Sellanrå was forgetting who she was, forgetting where she'd come from after a six-year absence! Oh, but Inger managed to show off her coat anyway, and neither the storekeeper's nor the blacksmith's nor the schoolmaster's wife was against having such a coat for herself, but they would wait and see.

It didn't take long before Inger began to receive customers. Some women came from the other side of the mountain out of curiosity; Oline had probably inadvertently dropped her name to some people. Those who came brought a lot of news from Inger's native parish; in return they were treated to a meal and allowed to see the sewing machine. Young girls came by twos from the coastal area, the village, seeking Inger's advice: it was fall, they had saved up money for a new garment, and Inger could tell them what the fashion was in the outside world and cut the material. Inger was revived by these visits, she bloomed; she was kind and helpful and, what's more, so skilled in her profession that she could cut by heart. At times she would also sew long seams on her machine for nothing and give the material back to the young girls with these superbly facetious words: "There, now you can sew on the buttons yourself!"

Later in the fall Inger was asked to come down to the village and sew for the big shots. That she was unable to do, she had people and animals and domestic duties, and she didn't have a maid. What didn't she? A maid!

"If I had some help, I could sew more steadily," she told Isak. Isak didn't understand: "Help?"—"Yes, help around the house, a maid." Isak must have felt completely at sea, because he chuckled in his iron beard and took it for a joke: "Yeah, we should've had a maid!" he said. "All housewives in the city do," Inger said. "Oh well," Isak said.

He may not have felt very pleased or kindly, not exactly in a good humor, no, for now he had started to build the sawmill and the work had been quite slow; he couldn't hold the posts with one hand, guide the level with the other and at the same time fasten the crossties. But after the boys came home from school, it was going better; the boys were very useful, a real blessing; Sivert especially was a crackerjack at pounding in nails, but Elseus was better at handling the plumb line. After about a week, Isak and the boys had actually managed to raise the posts and fasten them securely with crossties as thick as beams. A great job had been done.

It worked out—everything worked out. But Isak began to feel tired in the evenings, whatever the reason might be. It was not as if he simply had to build a sawmill and that was the end of it, all the other things had to be done as well. The hay was in, but the grain was ripening and must soon be cut and the sheaves put on stakes, and the potatoes would also have to be dug up before long. But Isak had an excellent help in the boys. He didn't thank them, that wasn't done among folks of their sort, but he was mightily pleased with them. Once in a while they would sit down for a moment in the middle of the work period and talk together; then the father might, almost in dead earnest, consult with his boys about what they should tackle next and what later. These were proud moments for the boys, and they learned to consider carefully before speaking, lest they should be in the wrong. "It would be too bad if we didn't manage to roof the sawmill before the fall rain sets in," their father said.

If only Inger had been as in the old days! But unfortunately, Inger was not as robust as she had been, it seemed, as was to be expected after being locked up for so long. That her mind had changed was another story—oh, she had become so thoughtless, more shallow somehow, frivolous. About the child she had killed, she said, "Some fool I was! We could've had her mouth fixed up with a few stitches, then I needn't have strangled her!" And she never went over to the little grave in the woods, where once she had patted down the earth with her hands and put up a cross.

But Inger was no brute, she continued to take good care of her other children, changing their clothes and sewing for them; she would sit up far into the night mending their things. It was her dream to see them get on in the world. The grain was put on the pole and the potatoes dug up. Then came the winter. The sawmill wouldn't get roofed this fall; oh well, it couldn't be helped, it wasn't a matter of life and death. Come summer, they would find a way.



## XIII

In winter there were the usual chores, hauling firewood and mending tools and carts, and Inger took care of the house and plied her needle. The boys were down in the village again for a long school term. Already for several winters they had had a pair of skis between them; they made out very well that way as long as they were home, one waiting while the other made his run, or standing behind him as he skied. They made out very well, all right, knowing nothing fancier; they were innocent. But in the village everything was on a larger scale, and the school swarmed with skis; it turned out that even the Breidablik children had each a pair. The upshot was that Isak had to make a new pair of skis for Elseus, Sivert holding on to the old pair.

And Isak did more, getting the boys new clothes and giving them an indestructible pair of boots. But having done so, Isak went to the storekeeper and ordered a ring. "A ring?" asked the storekeeper. "A finger ring, yes. I've become so vain that I would like to give my wife a ring."—"Do you want a silver ring, a gold ring, or simply a brass ring that has been exposed to gold smoke?"—"I want a silver ring." The storekeeper thought it over for a long time. "If you really want to do the right thing, Isak, and give your wife a ring she needn't be ashamed of, then let it be a gold ring."—"What!" Isak said loudly. But evidently, in his innermost heart, he had himself thought of a gold ring.

They talked it over in every way and agreed on a sort of measurement for the ring. Isak pondered deeply and shook his head, finding it all pretty steep, but the storekeeper refused to write for anything else than a gold ring. As Isak walked homeward, he was deep down glad about his decision, but at the same time he was appalled at the expenses that being in love could lead to.

There was a steady snowfall that winter, and when the roads became passable some time after the new year, people from the village began to haul telegraph poles over the moors and unload them at certain intervals. Driving with a team of horses, they came past Breidablik, past the Sellanrå farm, and were met by other horses with poles from the other side of the mountain—the line was complete.

Life went on, day by day, without great happenings. What should happen? In the spring the work of putting up the telegraph poles began; Brede Olsen was again a member of the crew, although there was spring planting to be done on his farm. How can he find the time? Isak must have thought again.

Isak himself had barely time to eat and sleep. He only just managed to get the spring work done in time, his tillage having by now become quite large.

But then, between the work seasons, he got the sawmill roofed over and could begin to install the machinery. Granted, what he had produced was no marvel of fine woodwork, but it was of titanic strength and stood there serving its purpose; the sawmill worked, the saw did cut. Isak had used his eyes when he visited the sawmill in the village and done a good job of taking after. It was an extremely small sawmill he had built, but he was satisfied with it; he carved the date over the doorway and made his mark.

And yet, something more than usual did happen that summer at Sellanrå.

The telegraph workers had now come so far upcountry that the foremost party dropped by the farm one evening and asked for lodgings. They could stay in the barn, they were told. As the days went by, the other parties caught up with them, and they were all put up at Sellanrå. The work advanced beyond the farm, but the men kept coming back to sleep in the barn. One Sunday night the engineer came to pay their wages.

The sight of the engineer made Elseus' heart go pit-a-pat, and he stole out the door to avoid being questioned about the colored pencil. Oh, what a miserable moment, without even the support of Sivert, who didn't come out! Elseus slipped by the corners of the house like a pale ghost, until he finally got hold of his mother and sent for Sivert. There was no other way out.

Sivert took the matter less hard, not having to bear such a heavy burden of guilt. The brothers sat down quite a way off and Elseus said, "What if you take the blame?"—"Me?" Sivert said. "Well, you're so much smaller, he wouldn't do anything to you." Sivert thought about it, seeing that his brother was distressed; also, he was flattered that Elseus needed him. "Maybe I could give you a helping hand," he said, very maturely. "You really would!" Elseus cried, simply giving his brother the stub that was still left of the pencil. "I'll give it to you for keeps," he said.

They had meant to go in again together, but Elseus had something to do at the sawmill, he said, or, to put it more correctly, at the flour mill, he said, something he wanted to check on; it would take some time, he would hardly be finished for quite a while. Sivert went in alone.

There sat the engineer paying out wages with bills and silver coins, and when he was through Inger gave him milk to drink, a pitcher and a glass, for which he was grateful. Then he talked to little Leopoldine, and when he saw the drawings on the wall beams, he immediately asked who was responsible for them. "Is it you?" he asked Sivert. The engineer was probably putting on airs out of gratitude for Inger's hospitality, and she was delighted by his praise of the drawings. Inger, for her part, gave a good explanation: her boys, the two brothers, had each a share in the drawings. They hadn't had paper before she came back home and got them some, and so they had scrawled on the walls. But she didn't have the heart to wash it off. "Leave it alone," said the engineer. "Paper?" he said, and just put out lots of big sheets. "There, go ahead and draw, until I come back the next time. How about pencils?" Sivert simply

stepped up with the pencil stub and showed how small it was. He was given a new one, an uncut colored pencil. "Go ahead and draw! But you'd better paint the horse red and the billygoat blue. Right? You haven't seen a blue horse, have you?"

Then the engineer left.

That same evening a man came up from the village with a bag; he handed out some bottles to the workers and went off again. But after he was gone it was no longer so quiet at Sellanr ; accordion music was heard, there was loud talk, singing and a bit of dancing in the yard. One of the workers wanted Inger to join him for a hop, and Inger—who could figure her out?—laughed a little laugh and, indeed, did a few turns with him. Afterward, several others asked her too, so she ended up dancing quite a bit.

Who could figure out Inger! Perhaps she was now dancing her first blissful dance in all her life, sought after, ardently pursued by thirty men; she was alone, the only one to choose from, no one to cut her out. And how those brawny telegraph fellows could lift her! Why not dance? Elseus and Sivert were already fast asleep in the side room, with all this racket going on outside, but little Leopoldine was up and watching her mother's jumps in wonderment.

Meanwhile Isak was out in the fields, having gone off directly after supper, and when he came home to go to bed, he was offered a bottle and drank a bit. He sat down and watched the dance with Leopoldine on his lap. "Now, here's your chance to shake a leg," he said good-naturedly to Inger, "you've certainly found your feet!" he said.

But in a while the musician stopped playing and the dance was over. The workers made ready to go to the village for the rest of the night and all of the next day, and wouldn't be back until Monday morning. Soon all was quiet again at Sellanr ; a couple of older men stayed behind and went to bed in the barn.

Isak looked around for Inger, meaning to ask her to take Leopoldine inside and to bed, but not seeing her, he carried the child in and put her to bed himself. He turned in as well.

When he woke up well into the night, Inger wasn't there. Is she in the cowshed? he thought, got up and went there. "Inger?" he asked. No answer. The cows turned their heads and looked at him, all was quiet. By force of habit he counted the cattle, counted the goats and sheep; one ewe had a way of staying out at night, and now it was out again. "Inger?" he asked. Again no reply. Surely she can't have gone with them all the way to the village, he thought.

The summer night was light and warm. Isak sat on the doorstep a while; then, getting up, he went out into the woods to look for the ewe. He found Inger. Inger here? Inger and one more. They were sitting in the heather; she was twirling his peaked cap on her index finger as they talked together. She was sought after again, it seemed.

Isak lumbered slowly up to them. When Inger turned and noticed him, she became like a rag; her chest sinking forward, she dropped the cap, reduced to nothing. "Hm. Do you know that the ewe is gone again?" Isak said. "But you aren't likely to know that," he said.

The young telegraph worker picked up his cap and began to sidle off: "I guess I'll join up with the others," he said. "Well, good night!" he said and went off. No one replied.

"So, this is where you are!" Isak said. "Are you going to stay here, maybe?"

He began walking homeward. Inger rose to her knees, got on her feet and followed him; they walked thus, husband in front, wife behind, in tandem. They came home.

Inger must have found time to think: she saved her neck! "I was going to look for the ewe, that was it, exactly," she said, "I noticed that she was gone. Then that fellow came, he helped me look. We had barely sat down when you came. Where are you going now?"

"I? I guess I'll go look for the animal."

"No, you must go to bed. And if somebody is to go and look some more, let me do it. Just go to bed, you need it. But come to think, the sheep can stay out, she has done so before."

"Yes, and get devoured by some beast or other?" Isak said and went off.

"No, don't trouble yourself!" she cried, catching up with him. "You need rest, I'll go."

Isak let himself be persuaded. And he didn't want to hear that Inger should go on looking for the sheep either. They both went inside.

Inger at once checked on the children, dropping in on the boys in the side room; she acted as if she had been on a most lawful errand. And it almost looked as though she was making up to Isak, as if she expected a more violent lovemaking than ever tonight—after all, now he had been given a full explanation. But no thanks, Isak couldn't turn around that easily; he would rather have seen her strangely sorrowful and beside herself with remorse. That was what he would have liked to see. What did it amount to that she collapsed a bit in the woods, that she was slightly ill at ease when he caught her out—what did it amount to when it wore off so quickly!

The next day, which was a Sunday, he was by no means sweet-tempered either, but wandered about outdoors, inspecting the sawmill and the flour mill and looking at the fields in the company of the children or by himself. When Inger made an attempt to join them, Isak walked away. "I have to go upstream and check on something," he said. Something or other was gnawing at him, no doubt, but he took it in silence and didn't storm. Oh, there was a greatness to Isak, as to Israel, promised and swindled, but quite devout.

On Monday the mood was already lighter, and as the days passed the impression of that scandalous Saturday night began to be erased. Time mends so much, with spit and dirt, sleep and food, it heals all wounds. Isak was not in such a bad way, he wasn't even sure he had been wronged, and besides he had much else to think about; the haying season was right around the corner. And at long last the telegraph was all but finished, so it would soon be peaceful again on the farm. A broad, light road, a king's highway, ran through the leafy forest; there were poles strung with wire all the way to the mountains.

At the next and last payday, another Saturday, Isak arranged to be away from home; he wanted it that way himself. He went down to the village with butter and cheese and returned Sunday night. By then the workers had all left the barn, well, almost all; the last one was just rolling out of the yard with a bag on his shoulder, almost the last, that is. That the place was not yet completely safe became clear to Isak when he noticed a large wooden box left behind in the barn; where the owner was he didn't know, and didn't care to know, but a peaked cap lay on top of the box—another shocking piece of evidence.

Isak flung the box into the yard, flung the cap after it and closed the barn. Then he went into the stable and peered through the windowpane. Let the box just stand there, he probably thinks, and let the cap lie there, it doesn't matter who it belongs to, he's a good-for-nothing and I don't care a hoot about him, he probably thinks. But when he comes to get the box, Isak will go out and pinch his arm a bit, making it turn blue. And as for showing him the way out of the yard, he will see to that too!

Whereupon Isak left the window in the stable, entered the cowshed and peered from there, unable to calm down. The box was lashed with string, the poor fellow having left it without a lock, and the string had come loose—had Isak handled the box too roughly? Whatever the reason, he no longer felt certain he had done the right thing. Just now, on his trip to the village, he had seen his new harrow, a disc harrow for newly cleared land he had ordered—oh, an incredible machine, a regular icon, and now it had arrived. Would it bring blessings in its wake, he wondered. The powers above that guided the steps of human beings were perhaps watching him at this very moment, to see if he deserved a blessing or not. Isak was always preoccupied with the powers above; in fact, he had seen God with his own eyes in the forest one fall night—a rather strange sight that was.

Going out into the yard, Isak lingered by the box. He was still hesitating; tilting his hat and scratching his head, he acquired a smart, jaunty look suggestive of a Spaniard. But then he must have thought something like this: Why, here I am, and far from being splendid or excellent, I'm a swine. Then he lashed the string tightly around the box, picked up the cap and carried it all into the barn again. There, it was done.

When he left the barn and went down to the flour mill, away from the yard, away from everything, there was no Inger to be seen in the window. Oh, well, let her be wherever she likes—anyway, she was no doubt in bed, where else should she be? But in the old days, in those innocent first years in the new homestead, Inger was restless and stayed up waiting for him when she expected him back from the village. It was different now, different in every way. As when he gave her that ring—could anything have been a greater fiasco? Excessively modest, Isak hadn't called it a gold ring, far from it: "It's nothing special, but why don't you slip it on your finger and try it?"—"Is it gold?" she asked. "Yes, but it's not very broad," he said. Here she was supposed to have answered, Oh yes, it is! But she said, "Well, not very broad exactly, but still."—"Keep it anyway, it's no worse than a bit of grass on your finger," he said at last, disheartened.

But Inger was, indeed, grateful for the ring and, wearing it on her right hand, she flashed it when she sewed; now and then she would let the village girls try it on and sit with it on their finger for a while when they came to her for advice. How could Isak fail to understand that she was tremendously proud of the ring! . . .

But it was dreary to sit here in the mill and listen to the waterfall all night. Isak had done nothing wrong and didn't need to hide. He left the mill, went up through the field and home, into the house.

The next moment Isak felt embarrassed—indeed, both glad and embarrassed. Brede Olsen, his neighbor, no one else, was sitting there; he was sitting there drinking coffee. Oh yes, Inger was up, the two of them just sat there chatting and drinking coffee. "There's Isak!" Inger said in a pleasant tone of voice, got up and poured a cup for him, too. "Good evening!" Brede said, and was just as pleasant.

Isak could easily tell that Brede had been at the telegraph workers' farewell party, he looked rather weary for lack of sleep; but it didn't matter, he laughed and was in an amiable mood. Naturally, he bragged a bit: With the farm and all, he really hadn't had the time for this telegraph job, but he couldn't very well say no when the engineer had wanted him so badly. And, of course, it had led to his having to take on the position of line inspector. It was not for the sake of the money, Brede could make many times more down in the village, but he hadn't wanted to seem unwilling. And so they had given him a little shiny machine to put on the wall, a rather amusing thing, almost a telegraph in itself.

Try as he might, Isak couldn't bear a grudge against this petty braggart and sluggard; for that he was all too relieved at finding his neighbor here tonight instead of a stranger. Isak had the balance of a freeholder, his few feelings, his stability and slowness; he played along with Brede and nodded to his shallowness. "You wouldn't have another cup of coffee for Brede, would you now?" he asked Inger. And Inger obliged.

By the way, Inger told them about the engineer; he was an incredibly kind man. He had looked at the boys' drawings and penmanship and said he wanted to take Elesus into his home. "Take him into his home?" Isak asked. "Take him to the city. He wanted him to write for him, to have him as an office clerk, that's how much he liked his drawings and his penmanship."—"I see," Isak said. "Well, what do you think? He also wanted to have him confirmed. I thought it was great."—"So did I," Brede said. "And I

know the engineer well enough to believe that, when he says something like that, he means it.”—“We don’t have an Eleseus to spare on this farm,” Isak said.

These words were followed by an awkward silence. Obviously, Isak was not the sort of man one could talk to. “What about the boy himself, if he wants to get ahead,” Inger said at last, “and has a natural ability for improving himself!” she said. Another silence. But now Brede said, laughing, “I wish the engineer would take one of mine! I have plenty of them. But the eldest is Barbro, and she’s a girl.”—“Oh, Barbro is all right,” Inger said, to be polite. “She certainly is,” Brede echoed, “Barbro is capable and a real go-getter, she’s going into service with the sheriff now.”—“She is?”— “I had to give my promise, can you believe it? The sheriff’s wife wouldn’t take no for an answer.”

It was well into the morning by now and Brede made ready to go. “I have a box and a cap that I left in your barn,” he said. “Unless the men made off with everything,” he added jestingly.

## XIV

And time went by.

Elseus got to the city, all right. Inger had her will. He stayed for about a year, then he was confirmed, and afterward he sat permanently in the engineer's office and became more and more proficient at writing. Oh, the kind of letters he sent home sometimes, written with black and red ink, regular pictures! And what language he used, like giving a speech! Now and then he would ask for money, for support; he needed it for a pocket watch with chain, so he wouldn't oversleep in the morning and show up late in the office. He needed it for a pipe and tobacco, like the other young clerks in town, for something he called pocket money and something he called evening school, where he learned drawing and gymnastics and other necessary subjects for someone with his social status and position. All in all, it was not cheap to keep Elseus in his city job.

"Pocket money," Isak asked, "is that money to keep in your pocket?"—"It must be," Inger thought, "it's not to be completely without, belike. And a dollar now and then isn't really very much."—"That's just it, a dollar now and a dollar then," Isak replied angrily. But he was angry because he missed Elseus and wanted him to be home. "It adds up to many dollars," he said. "I won't tolerate it, you must write that he won't get any more."—"All right," Inger said, offended. "What pocket money does Sivert get?" Isak asked. "You haven't been to the city and don't understand," Inger replied, "and Sivert doesn't need any pocket money. Anyway, we won't have to worry about Sivert anymore when Uncle Sivert dies."—"That you don't know."—"Sure I do."

And in a way it was true: Uncle Sivert had given out that Little Sivert would be his heir. Uncle Sivert had been outraged when he heard about the grand, extravagant life Elseus was leading in the city and, nodding and clenching his fists, he made clear that a grandnephew of his who was named after him—after Uncle Sivert—would in no way be left to languish. But what did Uncle Sivert really own? Besides his mismanaged farm and his boatshed, did he also have a nice bit of money and capital, as was generally assumed? No one knew. Add to this the fact that Uncle Sivert was a self-willed person, demanding that Little Sivert should come and stay with him. This was a point of honor with Uncle Sivert: he wanted to take Little Sivert into his home, just as the engineer had done with Elseus. But how could Little Sivert be sent away from home? It was out of the question. He was his father's only help. Besides, the boy himself had no particular desire to stay with his granduncle, the famous township treasurer. He had tried to once, but had come home again. He was confirmed, shot up and grew, got a fine down on his cheeks and huge hands with calluses on them. He did the work of a grown man.

Isak would never have been able to build the new barn without Sivert's help, but there it was, with a barn bridge, air vents and all, as large as the parsonage barn itself. True, it was only a half-timbered building with weatherboarding, but extra solidly made, with iron hooks at the corners and covered with one-inch boards cut in his own sawmill. And here Little Sivert had hammered in more than one nail and lifted the heavy logs for the framework till he nearly dropped. Sivert got along with his father and worked steadily at his side, he was of the same stuff. And so far he wasn't too refined or spoiled to go up the hillside and rub himself with a bit of tansy when he wanted to smell nice in church. By contrast, little Leopoldine was beginning to have greater requirements, as was to be expected, she being a girl and the only daughter. This summer, she hadn't been able to eat her porridge at supper unless it had syrup on it—she just couldn't get it down. Nor was she much good at any kind of work.

Inger hadn't given up the idea of having a maid; she had mentioned it every spring, and each time she could get nowhere with Isak. How much more cutting out, sewing, embroidering slippers and fine weaving she could have done if she had enough time! And actually Isak was no longer so stubbornly opposed as before, though he still grumbled. Whew, the first time he had reeled off a long rigmarole, not from a sense of fairness, nor of pride, but, alas, from weakness, from rage. But now he seemed to give a little, feeling ashamed.

"If I am to have help in my house, now is the time," Inger said. "Because later Leopoldine will be big enough to do some things."—"Help?" Isak asked. "What do you need help for?"—"What I need help for? Don't you have help yourself? What about Sivert?"

What could Isak say to such foolishness? "Well," he answered, "when you get a girl, I suppose the two of you will plow and mow and harvest all by yourselves. And Sivert and I can go our way."

"However that may be," Inger replied, "right now I could get Barbro to come, she has written home about it."—"Which Barbro?" Isak asked, "Brede's Barbro?"—"Yes. She is in Bergen."—"I don't want to see Brede's Barbro up here," he said. "Whatever you may do about getting someone else," he added.

So he wouldn't say no to someone else.

Isak didn't trust Barbro of Breidablik, she was flighty and shallow like her father—perhaps also like her mother—she was giddy and without stamina. She hadn't remained for very long at the sheriff's, only a year; after confirmation she came to the storekeeper's and was there another year. Here she became religious and converted, and when the Salvation Army came to the village, she joined up and got a red patch on her sleeve and a guitar in her hands. In that get-up she went to Bergen on the storekeeper's sloop, last year that was. She had just sent her photograph home to Breidablik, Isak had seen it: a strange-looking citified girl with her hair curled and a long watch chain hanging down her breast. Her parents were proud of little Barbro and showed the picture to whoever came by;

it was wonderful how she had reformed and made good, and she didn't have a red patch on her sleeve or a guitar in her hands anymore.

"I took it along and showed it to the sheriff's wife," Brede said, "she didn't recognize her."—"Is she going to stay in Bergen?" Isak asked distrustfully. "She'll stay in Bergen as long as she can chew bread," Brede answered. "Unless she'd rather go to Kristiania," he said. "What could she do here at home? She's got a new place now, as housekeeper for two fine clerks, young bachelors. And she's getting a whopping salary."—"How much?" Isak asked. "She doesn't say exactly in the letter. But I can tell it must be an awful lot, compared to here with us, because she gets Christmas presents and various other gifts without any deductions from her wages."—"Uh-huh," Isak said. "You wouldn't need her for a maid by any chance, would you?" Brede asked. "Me?" Isak asked. It escaped him. "Well, heh-heh, it was only a manner of speaking, Barbro will stay where she is. Come to think of it, you didn't notice anything wrong with the telegraph farther up, did you?"—"With the telegraph? No."—"Oh no, there haven't been any problems with the telegraph since I took it over. And, you know, I do have my own machine on the wall to warn me if something is broken. I guess I'll have to take a walk up along the line one of these days and look it over. I have far too much to do and to manage, it's more than a job for one man. But being an inspector, entrusted with this public charge, I have to attend to it as long as it lasts."—"You aren't thinking of giving it up, are you?" Isak asked. "I don't know," Brede replied. "I haven't made a decision on that. They are after me to move down into the village again."—"After you? Who are they?" Isak asked. "All of them. The sheriff wants me for bailiff again, the doctor misses my services as a driver, and the parson's wife would have wanted me to lend her a hand more than once if it hadn't been such a long way to go. How was it, Isak, did you get as much money as they said for that mountain of yours?"—"Yes, that's no lie," Isak replied. "But what did Geissler want with it? It's just sitting there. Very strange. Meanwhile time is passing, one year after another." Isak had often pondered this riddle himself, had spoken to the sheriff about it, had inquired about Geissler's address so he could write to him. Indeed, it was altogether strange. "I don't know," Isak said.

Brede made no secret of his interest in this mountain deal. "It's rumored," he said, "that other mountains up in the common besides yours may contain great values, and we are just walking around like dumb animals and don't see it. I've decided to go up there myself some day to investigate."—"You know something about rocks and types of stone then, do you?" Isak inquired. "Well, I do know a bit, and I've been asking others off and on. Anyway, I have to come up with something, I cannot support my large family simply by farming. That is utterly impossible. It was different with you who got all that timberland and all that good soil. My place has nothing but bogs."—"Bogs make for good soil," Isak said shortly. "I have bogs myself."—"They're impossible to drain," Brede replied.

But it was not impossible to drain the bogs. As Isak went down the road today, he came upon new clearings; two of them were lower down, nearer the village, but one was way up, between Breidablik and Sellaanr —yes, work was getting under way in the back country, which lay waste when Isak first came here. These three new settlers were from outside the parish and seemed to be sensible folk; the first thing they did was not to borrow money and build a house, oh no, they came one year, dug trenches and vanished, as though they were dead. That was the right way: drain the land, plow, plant. Aksel Str m was now Isak's closest neighbor, a capable man, unmarried, a native of Helgeland; he had borrowed Isak's disc harrow to break up the boggy ground, and only the second year had he put up a hayshed and a turf hut for himself and a few animals. His place was called M neland, because the moon shone so nicely on it. He didn't have a woman of his own and found it difficult to get help in the summer, being so out-of-the-way; but his tack was absolutely the right one. Or should he have done like Brede, first build a house and then move into the wilds with a family and many little ones, with neither fields nor livestock to keep body and soul together? What did Brede Olsen know about draining bogs and turning up virgin soil!

He knew how to fritter his time away with idleness, Brede Olsen did. Didn't he rush past Sellaanr  one day on his way to the mountains for the sole purpose of looking for precious metals! He returned in the evening without having found anything definite, he said, only a few indications, he said, nodding. He was going to repeat the trip very soon; he would also examine the mountains over toward Sweden.

And sure enough, Brede came again. He seemed to have developed a taste for it, but blamed the telegraph, saying he had to check on the line. Meanwhile his wife and children looked after the farm or let things ride. Isak was sick and tired of his visits and left the room when he came; then Inger and Brede would talk heartily together. What could they have to talk about? Well, Brede was often down in the village and had always some news to tell about the big shots there, while Inger had her famous trip to Trondhjem and her stay there to tell about. During the years she was away she had turned into a chatterbox, ready to palaver with anybody. No, she wasn't the innocent and true Inger she used to be.

Women and young girls continued coming to Sellaanr  to have a garment cut or a long machine seam done in a jiffy, and Inger entertained them well. Oline also came back; she couldn't help it, most likely, and came spring and fall, mealy-mouthed, smirking and false. "I wanted to see how you were getting on," she said each time. "And I miss the little boys so terribly," she said, "I grew so fond of them, angels that they were. Well, they're big fellows now, of course, but it's very strange—I just can't forget when they were little and I had them in my care. And you build and build, making the place into a whole town! Will you be having a bell to ring with on the new roof of the barn, just like at the parsonage?"

One day when Oline came she was accompanied by another woman, and the two women and Inger had a pleasant time together. The more people Inger had sitting around her, the better she worked, cutting out and sewing, and the more she showed off, brandishing her scissors or her pressing iron. It reminded her of the time in the institution, where they were so many. Inger made no attempt to hide where she had her skill and knowledge from, namely, from Trondhjem. It was as though she hadn't been to prison in the ordinary way, but in an apprenticeship, to learn tailoring, weaving, dyeing, writing—she had it all from Trondhjem. She spoke

about the institution with a homey feeling; there were so many people, keepers and inspectors and guards. After returning home she felt so desolate, finding it hard to withdraw completely from the social life she had become used to. She would even pretend to have a cold, because she was unaccustomed to being exposed to the raw outdoor air; indeed, for years after her return her health didn't allow her to be open to wind and weather. It was the outdoor work she really should have had a maid for. "Good heavens," Oline said, "why shouldn't you have a maid? You who can afford it and have your learning and your big house!"

It was rather agreeable to be understood, and Inger didn't contradict her. She sewed away to a booming noise, flashing the ring on her finger.

"Now you can see," Oline said to the other woman, "isn't it true what I said, that Inger has got a gold ring?"—"Would you like to see it?" Inger asked, taking it off. Oline grabbed it; she didn't seem to be completely reassured, examined the ring the way a monkey examines a nut, and looked at the stamp. "Yes, I was right about Inger, with all her wealth and capital!" The other woman accepted the ring with awe and smiled humbly. "You may keep it for a while," Inger said, "just put it on, it won't break."

Inger was nice and kindhearted. She told them about the cathedral in Trondhjem, beginning like this: "You haven't seen the Trondhjem Cathedral, have you? No, you haven't been there." It was as though the cathedral belonged to her, she defended it, boasted of it, indicated its height and width, a fairy tale. Seven ministers preached simultaneously in it and yet couldn't hear one another. "Then I suppose you haven't seen St. Olav's Well either? It lies in the middle of the cathedral, on one side, and it's bottomless. When we went there we each took along a pebble and dropped it in, but it never touched bottom." The women whispered, wagging their heads. "And besides, there are a thousand other things in the cathedral," Inger burst out, carried away, "there is the silver shrine, for example. It's the shrine of St. Olav, which belonged to him. But the marble church, which was a small church of pure marble, was taken away from us by the Danes during the war. . . ."

The women were about to leave. Pulling Inger aside, Oline took her to the shed, where she knew all the cheeses were stored, and shut the door. "What do you want?" Inger asked. Oline whispered, "Os-Anders doesn't dare come here anymore. I've warned him."—"Oh," Inger said. "How dare he after what he did to you, I told him!"—"Well," Inger said, "he's been here many a time since all the same, and for that matter I don't mind if he comes, I'm not scared of him."—"No," Oline said, "but I know what I know, and if you like I'll report him."—"Oh well," Inger said. "No, don't bother."

But she didn't mind having Oline on her side; it cost a small goat cheese, but Oline thanked her extravagantly for it. "As I've always said and will say again, Inger doesn't hesitate when it comes to giving, then she uses both hands! Well, you're not scared of Os-Anders, but I've forbidden him to show himself before your eyes all the same. That was the least I could do for you."—"What would it matter if he came? He can no longer do me any harm," Inger said. Oline pricked up her ears: "You've found a remedy for it, have you?"—"I won't have another child," Inger said.

And so they were on the same footing, each with as good a trump as the other. For Oline knew that Os-Anders, the Lapp, had died the day before yesterday. . . .

Why wouldn't Inger have more children? She wasn't on bad terms with her husband, they were not at daggers drawn, far from it. They each had their oddities, but they rarely quarreled and never for very long, and afterward everything was fine again. Often Inger would even suddenly be just as in the old days and do a great job in the cowshed or in the fields; it was as though she saw the error of her ways and returned to her hearty self again. Then Isak looked at his wife with grateful eyes, and if he had been one of those who expressed their opinions without delay, he would have said something like this: "What? Hm. You must be joking?" or some other word of recognition. But he kept silent for too long and was too late with his praise. And so, most likely, there was no cheer in it for Inger, and she didn't bother to do a good job all the time.

She could have been past fifty and still had children; as it was, she might not even have turned forty. She had learned all sorts of things at the institution—had she also learned to play tricks with herself? After associating with the other murderesses, she came home so learned and well educated; perhaps she had also heard a thing or two from the men, the guards and the doctors. One day she told Isak what a young medicine man had said about her misdeed: Why should one go to prison for killing one's children, even healthy ones, even well-formed children? They were nothing but lumps of flesh, after all. "Was he an ogre, then?" Isak asked. "Him!" Inger cried, then went on to relate how kind he had been to her, to Inger herself, and that it was none other than he who had prevailed upon another doctor to operate on her mouth and turn her into a human being. Now she only had a scar.

Now she only had a scar and was a really handsome wife, tall and not heavy, dark with a rich head of hair, mostly barefoot in the summer, her skirt tucked up and showing a pair of very bold legs. Isak noticed them—who didn't!

No, they didn't quarrel, Isak had no gifts for it and his wife had become much quicker at answering back. To have a good solid quarrel, this log of a man, this water troll, needed time; he got entangled in her words and didn't manage to say much. Besides, he had some feeling for her, a mighty love. Anyway, he didn't have to stand up to her very often; Inger didn't attack him, he was an excellent husband in many ways and she left him alone. What did she have to complain about? Isak was definitely not to be despised, she could have ended up with someone worse. Worn out? To be sure, he had shown signs of being tired, but not enough to worry about. He was, so to speak, full of old vitality and as good as new, like her, and now, in the late summer of their life together, he took care of his part of tenderness at least as warmly as she did of hers.

But there was nothing particularly splendid or beautiful about him, was there? No. And in this respect she was superior to him. Inger must have thought to herself at times that she had seen grander things, men wearing fine clothes and sporting a cane, gentlemen with handkerchiefs and starched collars—oh, those city slickers! And so she treated Isak for what he was, only according to his

deserts, as it were, no better: he was a homesteader in the forest; if her mouth had been all right from the start, she would never have taken him, that she knew now. No, then she could have taken someone else. The home he had given her, all that lonely existence Isak had prepared for her, was in reality rather mediocre; she could at least have been married in her home parish and had company and some social life, instead of being a wood nymph in the wilds. Here she didn't fit in anymore, she had acquired a different view of things.

Strange how one's view could change! Inger was no longer able to be happy about a really fine calf or to clap her hands in wonder when Isak came back from the mountain lake with a big load of fish; no, she had been living for six years in a broader milieu. Also, little by little the time when she used to call him in for meals in a sweet, angelic voice had come to an end. "Come in and get something to eat, won't you?" she said now. What manner of speech was that! At first he was a bit surprised at this change, at her being so darn sullen and ungracious, and he replied, "I didn't know the food was ready." But when she declared that he must surely be able to tell that much by the sun, he stopped making objections or arguing about the matter.

Oh, but once he got a good hold on her and used it: that was when she tried to steal money from him. Not that he was greedy for money, but the money was definitely his. Ho, it could have been the ruin of her, leaving her maimed. And yet, Inger wasn't utterly depraved or profligate in doing this, since the money was for Eleseus, her blessed Eleseus in town, who was asking for his dollar again. Should he go there among all the fine folks and be completely broke? Didn't she have a mother's heart? She asked his father for the money, and when that didn't help she reached out for it herself. However it was, whether Isak suspected her or it happened by chance, the sly prank was discovered right away, and in the same moment Inger found herself gripped by both arms and felt herself lifted off the floor and then thrust down again. It was something extraordinary, a sort of avalanche. Isak's hands weren't worn and tired now. Inger gave out a groan, her head fell, she trembled and handed back the dollar.

Isak didn't say very much now either, though Inger put up no obstacle to his speaking; he kind of puffed out what he wanted to say: "Accursed wench, you aren't fit to have in the house anymore!"

He was altered beyond recognition. Oh, it was probably his way of giving vent to a long-standing chagrin.

It was a wretched day, followed by a long night and another day. Isak went away and spent the night outdoors, although there was dried hay to be brought in; Sivert was with his father. Inger had little Leopoldine and the animals, but she felt alone, crying nearly all the time and shaking her head at herself; she had experienced such an intense agitation only once before in her life, and now she happened to be reminded of it: the time when she suffocated a tiny little child.

Where had Isak and her son gone? They hadn't been idle, but had stolen a day and a night or a bit more from the haymaking and built a boat up at the mountain lake. Well, a crude and quite untrimmed little boat, but strong and tight like everything they made; and now they had a boat and could go fishing with nets.

When they came home the hay was dry as before. They had played a trick on the sky by trusting it, and they had done very well, emerging from it with a profit. Then Sivert said, pointing ahead, "Mother has been haying!" His father looked down the field and said, "Hm." Isak had, of course, seen at once that much of the hay was gone, and now Inger was doubtless home for the afternoon meal. It was extremely nice of her to bring in the hay, even though he had bawled her out yesterday. It was a coarse, heavy hay, she had worked hard; and there had been all the cows and goats to milk besides. "Go in and get a bite to eat!" Isak told Sivert. "What about you?"—"No."

When Sivert had been inside a while, Inger went out, stood humbly on the door slab and said, "Why don't you, too, please, go in and get yourself a bite to eat?" Isak gave out a grumble: "Hm!" he said. But Inger's humility had been such a rare experience lately that Isak's pigheadedness was beginning to give. "If you'd set a few teeth into my rake, I would rake some more," she said. She was addressing the master of the place, the head of it all, with a request, and she was thankful that he didn't turn her down with scorn. "You have raked and carted enough," he said. "No, it's not enough."—"I don't have time to mend your rake now, it's going to rain, don't you see!"

With that Isak went to work.

He wanted to spare her, no doubt; the few minutes it took to mend the rake would have been more than tenfold offset by Inger joining them in the hayfield. Inger came to join them anyway and, using the rake as it was, began to bundle the hay with a vengeance. Sivert came along with the horse and the hay wagon, they all pitched in, the sweat pouring off them, and the hay was brought in. It was a coup. And again Isak fell into a reverie about the powers above which guided all our steps, from stealing a dollar to bringing in a lot of hay. Moreover, there was the boat; after half a lifetime of brooding on the matter, there now lay a boat in the mountain lake. "Ay, good Lord!" Isak said.



## XV

All in all, it turned out to be a remarkable evening, a turning point. Inger, who had for a long time run beside the track, had been put in her proper place again by simply being lifted off the floor. Neither spoke about the incident; Isak had later felt ashamed of himself on account of this one dollar, which was no big money and would have to be paid out anyway, because he wanted Eleseus to have it. And furthermore, wasn't the dollar just as much Inger's as his? There came a time when it was Isak's turn to be humble.

There came many kinds of times. Inger had again come to see things differently, it seemed; changed once more, she gradually renounced her refinement and returned to being a serious and sincere wife on a new farm. To think that a man's fists could work such wonders! But that was as it should be—here was a strong and capable woman, warped by long confinement in an artificial atmosphere, trying to buck a man who had his feet planted firmly on the ground. He hadn't for a moment relinquished his natural place on the earth, his hearth and home. He couldn't be budged.

There came many different kinds of times; the following year the drought returned, quietly killing the crops and draining people's courage. The grain was getting scorched, the potatoes—those wonderful potatoes—were not scorched but flowered and flowered. The meadows were turning gray, but the potato plants flowered. The powers above governed all things, but the meadows were turning gray.

Then one day came Geissler, the former Sheriff Geissler came again at last. It was really strange—he was not dead but turned up again. What did he come for?

Geissler had nothing grand to show for himself this time, no mountain deals and important papers; he was poorly dressed, his hair and beard had turned gray, and his eyes were red-rimmed. He had no one to carry for him anymore, and no briefcase for his papers, which were stuffed in his pocket.

"Good morning," Geissler said.

"Good morning," Isak and Inger replied. "Well, a stranger's come our way!"

Geissler nodded.

"It was nice seeing you in Trondhjem!" Inger said. "Thanks for everything."

To this Isak, too, nodded and said, "Yes, thank you from both of us!"

But Geissler wasn't in the habit of baring his heart and gushing; he said, "I'm just taking a trip across the mountain, to Sweden."

Though the Sellanrå folks were in low spirits because of the drought, they became animated by Geissler's visit and treated him generously; it was a great pleasure to receive him cordially, he had been so good to them.

Geissler himself was not in low spirits and began at once to give his opinion, looking out across the fields and nodding. He was still keeping himself erect and looked as though he had several hundred dollars in his pocket. And there was an air of excitement about him; not that he made a lot of noise, but he had a lively way of talking.

"What a glorious place this Sellanrå is!" he said. "And now, Isak, more and more are trailing after you up the common; I counted five clearings. Are there more?"

"Seven all in all; two can't be seen from the road."

"Seven farms, let's say fifty people. It will eventually be a built-up area. Don't you already have a school district and a schoolroom?"

"Oh yes."

"That's what I've heard. A schoolroom at Brede's place, because it's more central. Just imagine, Brede has become a pioneer!" he said, making a face. "I've heard all about you, Isak, you're the boss here. I'm delighted. You've got a sawmill too, haven't you?"

"Such as it is. But it serves me well enough. I've also cut a log or two for those down below."

"That's as it should be!"

"I'm curious to know what you think of it, Sheriff, if you'll come and take a look at the sawmill."

Geissler nodded as if he were an expert, indicating he would look at the mill, look closely at everything. "You had two boys, where's the other?" he asked. "In the city? In an office? Hm!" Geissler said. "But that one there looks like a sturdy fellow, what was your name again?"

"Sivert."

"And the other?"

"Eleseus."

"In an engineering office? What is he learning there? It'll mean a starvation wage. He should've come to me," Geissler said.

"Yes," Isak said, to be polite. He felt sorry for him. Judging by the way he looked, good old Geissler could hardly afford to keep any outside help now; he probably had difficulty just keeping himself. That jacket he was wearing looked quite frayed at the wrists.

"Maybe you would like some dry socks?" Inger asked, bringing a new pair of her own; they were from her best days, thin and striped.

"No, thank you," Geissler said curtly, though he was obviously soaked. "He would've done much better to come to me," he said, speaking about Eleseus. "I could certainly have used him," he said, taking a small silver tobacco tin from his pocket and playing with it. It may have been the sole showpiece he had left from the old days.

But he was restless and unable to stick with anything for long; he put the silver tin back in his pocket and went on to something else: "But—is the meadow *gray* down there? I thought it was the shadow. Why is the field burning up? Come along, Sivert!"

He immediately got up from the table and the refreshments, turned around in the door to thank Inger for the meal and disappeared. Sivert followed.

They walked over to the stream, Geissler peering keenly about him all the while. "Here!" he said and stopped. Then he held forth: "It won't do to let the field get burned off, you have a great river to take water from! By tomorrow the meadow will be green!"

Sivert, astonished, said, "Yes?"

"You dig a medium-size ditch at an angle from here, the ground is even, and at the intake we'll use a gutter. You have a sawmill, so I suppose you can find some long boards, eh? Good. Go fetch a pick and a spade and start here. I'll be back and mark out the line properly with stakes."

Then he ran over to the house again, his boots squishing from being sopping wet. He set Isak to work making gutters, many gutters, to be laid down wherever the soil shouldn't be messed up with a ditch. Isak tried to object that the water might not go all the way, the distance was too great, and the dry ground would soak it up before it reached the scorched areas. Geissler explained that it would take some time, the soil would drink for a while, but gradually the moisture would flow on—"field and meadow will be green by this time tomorrow!"—"I see," Isak said, starting to nail together gutters for all he was worth.

Geissler rushed back to Sivert. "That's good," he said, "keep at it like that, I knew you were a powerhouse! Go by those stakes making the track. If you hit boulders or rock, turn aside, but in the same plane. You follow me? At the same level."

Back again to Isak. "You've finished one, we may need as many as six, so go at it, Isak; by tomorrow it'll be green, your crop is saved!" Geissler sat down on the ground, slapped his knees elatedly and chattered, thinking in flashes: "Do you have pitch, do you have oakum? Splendid, you've got everything. Because at first the gutters will leak, you know, later they swell and become as tight as bottles. You have both oakum and pitch since you built a boat, you say, where's that boat? In the mountain lake? I'll take a look at that too!"

Oh, Geissler promised so many things. He was a flighty gentleman, even more scatterbrained than before; every job had to be done in fits and starts. But when he worked, the pace was furious. He was not without superior qualities. Obviously, he had a penchant for exaggeration, fields and meadows couldn't possibly be green by the next day; but Geissler was a crackerjack at seeing things and making decisions, and it was really due to this strange man that the crop at Sellanrå was saved.

"How many gutters do you have now? It's not enough. The more gutters you have, the more easily the water will flow. If you nail together ten or twelve twenty-foot gutters, you'll gain by it. You've got some twenty-foot boards, you say? Use them, come fall it'll pay!"

Then Geissler couldn't sit still anymore, got up from the ground and ran over to Sivert again. "Splendid, my good fellow, now it's going well, your father is nailing and calking gutters, there will be more than I'd hoped for. Now, go over there and fetch some gutters and we'll start."

It was a mad rush all afternoon, the most frantic job Sivert had been part of, an entirely alien tempo for him; they barely allowed time for the afternoon meal. But now the water was flowing! Here and there they had to deepen the ditches, here and there a gutter had to be lowered or raised, but the water flowed. The three men kept busy till late in the evening, improving and brushing up on their work, but when the water began to trickle over the most dried-out places in the field, the Sellanrå folks felt a flutter of joy in their hearts. "I forgot my watch, what time is it?" Geissler asked. "Green by this time tomorrow!" he said.

Sivert got out of bed in the middle of the night to check on the watering. He ran across his father, who was out on the same errand. Heavens, what excitement and adventure in the back country!

But the next day Geissler stayed in bed till late and was listless, the fit was over. He couldn't bring himself to look at the boat in the mountain lake, and it was probably only out of a sense of decency that he went to take a look at the sawmill. He didn't even show the same warm interest in the watering as before; when he noticed that neither field nor meadow had turned green during the night, he lost heart, failing to consider that the water flowed and flowed, spreading out farther and farther over the tillage. He kept himself more or less afloat by saying, "It may well be you won't see it take effect until tomorrow. But don't lose heart."

Later in the day Brede Olsen dropped by, he had some stone samples he wanted to show Geissler. "In my opinion, they are really extraordinary," Brede said. Geissler didn't want to look at his stones. "Is this a way for a back-country farmer, to run around looking for riches?" he asked mockingly. Not keen on receiving any more rebukes from his former sheriff, Brede gave him tit for tat and,

putting himself on his level, said, "You don't impress me!"—"To this very day you've done nothing but wasting your time on trifles," Geissler said. "And how about yourself," Brede replied, "what else have you been doing all along! You have a mountain up here which is of no use to anybody, it's just sitting there. Heh-heh, sure, you're the right man to criticize."—"Go away!" Geissler said. And indeed, Brede didn't stay long, but shouldered his little bag and returned to his haunt without saying goodbye.

Geissler began leafing through some papers, pondering them carefully. It was as though he had tasted blood and wanted to look into the matter of the copper mountain, the contract, the analysis: after all, it was almost pure copper, copper ore, he ought to do something and not collapse again.

"What I've really come up for is to take care of it all," he told Isak. "I've been thinking of starting a big operation up in the mountain, very soon and with many men. What do you say?"

Again, Isak felt sorry for him and didn't contradict him.

"It's not a matter of no consequence to you. There will inevitably be lots of men around and no end of uproar and blastings, I don't know how you'll like that. On the other hand, there will be a great hustle and bustle in the district, and you will find it easy to sell your butter and cheese. And you can set your own price."

"Yes," Isak said.

"Not to mention the fact that you'll get a high percentage of what the mountain will yield. That'll be a lot of money, Isak."

"You've given me all too much already," Isak replied.

The following morning Geissler left the farm and shuffled eastward, toward Sweden. He said a curt no thanks to Isak's offer to walk with him a little way. It was almost painful to see him go away so poor and lonely. Inger had given him a wonderful parcel of food for the road, including waffles she had made for him, but even that wasn't good enough, far from it; she would also have liked him to take along a pailful of cream and a whole lot of eggs, except that he refused to carry them. Inger was quite disappointed in him.

Geissler seemed to feel badly about leaving Sellanrå without paying as he usually did, so he just acted as if he had paid, as if he had actually laid down a fair-sized bill, and said to little Leopoldine, "And here is something for you, come here!" With that he gave her the tobacco tin, the silver box. "You can wash it and keep needles in it," he said. "It isn't much of a present, I know, if I were home I'd have given you something else; I do have quite a few things, you know."

But the irrigation system remained after Geissler had gone, the gutters were working day and night, week after week, making the fields turn green, the potato plants bloom and the grain form spikes.

As time went on the settlers farther down came up and inspected the miracle; Aksel Strøm—the neighbor at Måneland, a bachelor without a woman of his own who was still keeping house for himself—he came too. He was cheerful today, being able to relate that he'd been promised a girl to help out in the summer, that worry was now over. He didn't mention the girl's name and Isak didn't ask, but it was Brede's Barbro he'd been promised, it would only cost a telegram to Bergen. Well, Aksel laid out the money for the telegram, although he was extremely close-fisted and even something of a miser.

It was the waterworks that had lured Aksel up this way today, he inspected it from one end to the other and was very interested. He had no big stream on his property, but he did have a brook; he didn't have boards for gutters either, but would use channels dug in the ground through the whole run. It could be done. So far his swampy, low-lying fields didn't look at all bad, but if the drought continued he, too, would have to irrigate. When he'd seen what he wanted, he said goodbye. He was invited in but couldn't spare the time; he was going to start digging channels that very evening. And off he went.

That was something else than Brede.

Anyway, Brede had gotten something to run around the moors with, namely, that they had a miracle of a watering system at Sellanrå. "You know, it doesn't pay to be too clever when you work the soil," he had said, "Isak has been digging ditches on his land for so long now that he's forced to irrigate!"

Isak was forbearing, but he often wished he could get rid of this man, this windbag hanging about Sellanrå. Brede blamed the telegraph, saying that as long as he was a public official he had to keep the line in order. But the telegraph authorities had had to reprimand him for his negligence several times already and had again offered the job to Isak. No, it wasn't the telegraph Brede was occupied with, but the metals up in the mountain; it had become a sickness with him, a fixed idea.

He would drop in at Sellanrå quite often now, convinced that he had found the treasure; he would nod and say, "I can't tell you much, but I won't deny that I've found something extra special!" He wasted his time and efforts, which came to nothing. But when he got home to his little house, tired after his day's work, he flung a little bag with stone samples on the floor, huffing and puffing, convinced that nobody worked harder to earn his keep. He raised a few potatoes in a sour bog and cut the tufts of grass that grew of themselves around the house—that was his farming. He was a square peg in a round hole, it had to end badly. His sod roof was already weatherworn and the stairs to the kitchen decayed from dripping; a small grindstone sat on the ground, and the cart was forever left in the open.

But Brede felt quite all right, inasmuch as such trifles never bothered him. When the children rolled the grindstone for fun, their father was sweet and amiable and would sometimes help them roll it. Lazy and easygoing by nature, without seriousness but also without a heavy heart, he was devoid of moral fiber and somewhat irresponsible, but managed to find a way to provide food, such as it

was, living with his family from one day to the next and keeping them all alive. But the storekeeper couldn't go on feeding Brede and his family forever, naturally; he had often told him so, and now he had told him sternly. Brede realized he was right and promised to find a way out: he would sell his place and perhaps make a really good profit on it and pay the storekeeper.

Even if he would lose by it, Brede would sell; what did he want with a farm! He was homesick for the village with its frivolity, gossip and general store—that was where he longed to be, instead of settling down here, working and forgetting the outside world. How could he forget the after-Christmas parties or the seventeenth of May or the bazaars in the village hall! He loved talking to people, to get the latest news, but who could he talk to here on the moors? Inger at Sellanrå had shown a certain turn for it a while, but now she had changed and become close-mouthed again. And besides, she had done time and he was a public official, it wasn't proper.

No, he had gone against his own best interest when he left the village. He noted with envy that the sheriff had obtained another bailiff and the doctor another carrier; he had run away from the people who needed him, and now that he was no longer at hand, they were managing without him. But what a bailiff and what a carrier! He, Brede, really ought to be brought back to the village by horse and buggy!

But then there was Barbro—why had he been interested in getting her to Sellanrå? Well, that was after talking things over with his wife. If everything worked out, it might mean a future for the girl, perhaps for the whole Brede family in a modest way. To keep house for two clerks in Bergen was all right, but God knows what she would get out of it in the long run; after all, Barbro was pretty and a go-getter, and she might have more of a knack for getting ahead here at home. There were two sons at Sellanrå.

But when Brede realized that this plan would fail, he worked out another. Come to that, marrying into the Sellanrå family, that of Inger, a former convict, was nothing to aspire to; there were other young men around, such as Aksel Strøm. He had a farm and a hut, he was a man who scraped and saved and little by little acquired some animals and other assets, but he had no wife and no woman to help him. "Take it from me, if you get Barbro you'll have all the help you need," Brede told Aksel. "Look, here's her picture," he said.

A couple of weeks later Barbro came. Aksel was now in the midst of the haymaking season and had to do the mowing at night and the haying in the daytime, being alone with everything, but then came Barbro! It was a real gift. It even turned out that Barbro could work, washing clothes and containers, preparing food, milking the animals and raking in the hayfield; she even helped carry in the hay, no less. Aksel decided he could give her good wages and still stand to gain.

She was not merely a photograph of a fine lady here. Barbro was straight and slim, had a rather husky voice, and showed maturity and experience in many things; she was no adolescent, recently confirmed. He couldn't understand why her face looked so thin and worn. "I should know you by sight," he said, "but the photograph is a poor likeness."—"It's because of the voyage," she replied, "well, also because of all that city air." Anyway, it didn't take long before she became pretty and plump again, and Barbro said, "After all that city air, such a voyage really takes it out of you, you bet it does!" She also alluded to the temptations offered by Bergen—there one had to look out! But as they sat chatting, she asked him to subscribe to a paper, a Bergen newspaper, so she could have some news from the outside world. She had become used to reading and theater and music, this place was so desolate.

Since Aksel Strøm had been so lucky with his summer help, he subscribed to the paper; he also bore with the Brede family's frequent visits to his place to eat and drink. He wanted to show that he appreciated his hired help. Nothing could be cozier than those summer evenings when Barbro plucked the strings of her guitar and sang a bit in her husky voice; he was fairly touched by it, by those nice foreign ballads and by the fact that someone really sat there singing on his new farm.

In the course of the summer he also got to know her in other respects, but on the whole he was satisfied. She was not without caprices, and she would answer hastily at times, a bit too point-blank. That Saturday night, for instance, when Aksel had to go down to the village store, was not the right time for Barbro to leave the animals and the hut and walk away from it all. It happened because of a slight disagreement. And where did she go? Only home, to Breidablik, but still.<sup>6</sup>

When Aksel came home to the hut at night, Barbro was gone; he saw to the animals, found himself something to eat and went to bed. Toward morning, Barbro came. "I just wanted to find out how it felt to be in a house with a wooden floor again," she said sarcastically. Aksel couldn't find much of an answer to that, having as yet only his turf hut with its dirt floor, but he did manage to say that he wasn't completely without timber, so there would certainly be a house with a wooden floor some day. Then she seemed to feel sorry, which was sweet of her, and even though it was Sunday she went straight to the woods to get fresh juniper sprigs for smartening up the dirt floor.

But since she was so excellent and so tenderhearted, Aksel, of course, had to come up with the pretty kerchief he had bought for her yesterday evening, though he had thought of putting it away until he would obtain something really nice from her in return. But there it was, she liked it and tried it on at once; she even asked him whether it became her. And, of course, it did; she could just as well have put his leather bag on her head, it would become her too! Then she laughed and, wanting to be really sweet in turn, said, "I'd much rather go to church and communion in this kerchief than in a hat. In Bergen, you know, we all wore hats, well, except for common servant girls from the countryside."

Sheer friendship once again.

And when Aksel brought the paper which he had picked up at the post office, Barbro started reading the news from the outside world, about a burglary at a jewelry shop in Strand Street, a fight among Gypsies, and the dead body of a baby found drifting ashore from the Stadt Sea. It was sewed up in an old shirt with the sleeves cut off. "Who can have thrown that baby into the sea?" Barbro said. By force of habit, she also read the market prices. The summer went by.

## XVI

Great changes at Sellanrå.

Nothing was as in the early days, the place was unrecognizable: there were houses of all kinds, sawmill and flour mill, and the wilderness had become a home to human beings. And there was more to come. But Inger was perhaps the most remarkable, so turned around and energetic again.

Last year's crisis had apparently not sufficed by itself to overcome her frivolity; at the outset she had relapses, such as catching herself wanting to talk about the institution and about Trondhjem Cathedral. There were small, innocent things, like removing the ring from her finger and lengthening her daringly short skirts. She had become thoughtful, it grew quieter on the farm, the visits decreased, and the strange girls and wives from the village came more seldom because she didn't take up with them. No one can live deep in the wilds and keep on playing around. Happiness is not the same as having fun.

In the wilds every season has its wonders, but there is always something unchanging: the immense, heavy sound of heaven and earth, the sense of being surrounded on every side, the darkness of the forest, the friendliness of the trees. Everything is heavy and soft, no thought is impossible there. North of Sellanrå there was a tiny little tarn, a puddle, no bigger than an aquarium. Swimming around in it were little baby fish which never grew bigger; they lived and died there and were no use at all—goodness, no, not in the least. One evening when Inger stood there listening for the cowbells, she heard nothing else, because all was dead round about; but she did hear a song from the aquarium. It was so small, next to nothing, dying away. It was the little fishes' song.

They were fortunate at Sellanrå, every fall and spring, in seeing the graylag geese sailing in formation over the wilderness and hearing their chatter high in the air—it sounded like someone talking in delirium. The world seemed to stand still for a moment, until the flock had disappeared. And the people, didn't they feel a certain weakness glide through them then? They went back to their work, but only after catching their breaths; something had spoken to them from the beyond.

They were surrounded by great wonders at all times, in winter the stars, often also the northern lights, a firmament of wings, a fire in God's house. Now and then—not often or usually, but now and then—they heard the thunder. This was mostly in the fall, when the darkness put both man and beast in a solemn mood; the cattle grazing in the home pasture would huddle together and stand waiting. What did they hang their heads for? Were they waiting for the end? And what were the people in the wilds waiting for when they stood in the storm, their heads bowed?

Spring with its rush and frenzy and rapture, all right, but fall! It made you feel afraid of the dark and say your evening prayers, you became clairvoyant and heard omens. On fall days people would go out and look for something—the men for a piece of wood to work, the women for the animals, which were now running frantically after mushrooms—and come home with many secrets in their hearts. Had they inadvertently stepped on an ant and glued its hind part to the path, so that the forepart couldn't break free? Had they got too close to a ptarmigan's nest, arousing the hostility of a hissing, flapping mother? Not even those big boletus mushrooms that the cows go for are meaningless, human eyes do not turn white and empty from looking at them. Such a mushroom doesn't bloom or move, but it has a weltering look; it is a monster, resembling a lung that sits there alive and naked, without a body.

At length Inger was rather broken down, oppressed by the wilds, and turned religious. How could she have avoided it? Nobody in the wilds can avoid it; life there is not merely earthly toil and worldliness, there is piety, fear of death and rich superstition as well. Inger thought, no doubt, that she had more reason than others to expect divine chastisement, it wasn't likely to let her off; she knew, after all, that God walked around in the evening inspecting his wilderness, and with his fabulous eyes he would be sure to find her. There wasn't very much in her daily life she could do something about—well, she could bury her gold ring at the bottom of a chest, and she could write Eleseus and tell him that he, too, should convert; but, beyond that, she could only strive to work well and not spare herself. One thing more she could do: dress in humble garments and just wear a blue silk ribbon around her neck to mark Sunday. This spurious and unnecessary poverty was the expression of a sort of philosophy, of self-abasement, stoicism. The blue silk ribbon was secondhand, having been unstitched from a hat which Leopoldine had outgrown; it was faded here and there and, frankly speaking, a bit soiled. It was now worn by Inger as a humble piece of finery on red-letter days. Well, she exaggerated, imitating the penury in the cotters' shacks; she feigned an artificial poverty. Would she have been more deserving if she had been forced to content herself with such a mean piece of finery? Leave her alone, she is entitled to it!

She greatly exaggerated and did more than she should. There were two men on the place, but Inger kept her eyes open and sawed wood when they were away, whatever such self-torture and punishment were good for. She was so unimportant as a person, so insignificant, her gifts so ordinary; her life or death wouldn't be noticed in the country at large, only here in the wilds. Here she was almost a biggie, no one was bigger anyway, and she probably felt that she was worth all the discipline she allowed herself the luxury of imposing on herself. Her husband said, "Sivert and I have talked things over, we won't stand for your sawing our wood and wearing yourself out."—"I'm doing it for the sake of my conscience," she replied.

Conscience? The word made Isak thoughtful again; he was a man getting on in years, slow-witted, but weighty when he finally got moving. A conscience must be something pretty strong if it could turn Inger all topsy-turvy. And however it might be, Inger's conversion also had an effect on him; she infected her husband, who became preoccupied and subdued. It was a very difficult winter and, unable to cope with it, he sought solitude, went into hiding. To save his own forest, he had bought a few dozen good logs in the

government forest over toward Sweden, and he didn't want any help to fell this timber; Sivert was ordered to stay at home, to keep his mother from overworking herself.

And so, during those short winter days, Isak set off to the woods in darkness and came home again in the dark. There wasn't always a moon, or stars, and sometimes his own track from the morning had been erased by drifting snow and he was hard pressed to find his way. One evening something happened to him.

He had covered most of the way back, and in the strong moonlight he could see Sellanrå over on the hillside; there it sat, nice and tidy, but looking small and almost like some haunt of the hill folk, those little people of the netherworld, because it was so snowed in. Now he would have timber again, and Inger and the children would surely be surprised when they learned what he meant to use it for, a building that was simply out of this world. He sat down in the snow to rest a little while, so he wouldn't come home dog-tired.

All is quiet around him. God bless this quiet, pensive mood, it's a good thing. But Isak, after all, is a homesteader, and looking at his place over there he knows where he will clear land next; he can see himself lifting big stones and carrying them away. He has a definite knack for digging ditches. Right there, he now knows, lies a really swampy bit of bog on his property; it's full of ore, a metallic film usually sits on every puddle, and now he wants to drain it. With his eye he divides the ground into squares, and he has a plan what to do with these squares, and a dream: to make them all green and fruitful. Oh, a tilled plot was a great boon, it gave him the same feeling as order and justice and, yes, pleasure. . . .

He got up but couldn't quite get his bearings. Hm? What had happened? Nothing, he had just sat down for a moment. Something is standing in front of him, a being, a spirit, gray silk—no, it was nothing. He had a funny feeling, took a short, faltering step forward and walked straight at a glaring eye, large, a pair of eyes. At the same moment the nearby aspens began to rustle. Well, everybody knows that aspens can have an unpleasant, bullying way of rustling; in any case, Isak had never before heard such a nasty rustling and he got the shivers. Then he tried to feel his way with his hand, perhaps the most helpless movement that hand had ever made.

But what was this thing in front of him, and did it have a mane or not? Isak had, of course, always been willing to swear that there was a higher power, and once he had actually seen it, but what he was now seeing had no resemblance to God. Could it be the Holy Ghost which looked like this? But if so, why was he standing here, on the flat, a pair of eyes, one glaring look, no more? If it was in order to get him, to fetch his soul, that couldn't be helped; it would come to pass sometime anyway, and then he would be saved and go to heaven.

Isak was anxious to know what would happen next; he was still shivering, the figure gave off a cold draft, a chill—it had to be the devil. Here Isak got to more familiar ground, so to speak, it might be the devil. But what did he want here? What, precisely, had he caught Isak doing? To sit still tilling the soil in your thoughts couldn't possibly have angered him. Isak knew of no other sin he had committed, he was simply on his way home from the logging woods, a laboring man both tired and hungry. He was going to Sellanrå, it was all well meant—.

Then he took another step forward, but it was not a long step, and besides he pulled back again immediately. When the vision refused to budge, Isak knitted his brows, as if starting to get suspicious. If it was the devil, let it be the devil, but he didn't have the supreme power. For one, Luther had nearly killed him once, and several people had charmed him away by making the sign of the cross and invoking the name of Jesus. Not that Isak courted danger and sat down and laughed in his face, but at least he gave up the idea of dying and going to heaven as he had intended at first; he took two steps towards the vision, crossed himself and shouted, "In Jesus' name!"

Hm? At the sound of his own voice it was as though he suddenly came to himself again and saw Sellanrå over on the hillside. The aspens weren't rustling any longer. The pair of eyes were gone from the empty air.

He didn't linger on the way home, nor did he court danger. But when he stood, safe and sound, on his own door slab, he cleared his throat vigorously and walked in with a lofty air, like a real man—indeed, like a man of the world.

Taken aback, Inger asked why he was deathly pale.

Then he didn't deny he'd seen the devil.

"Where?" she asked.

"Over there. Opposite us."

Inger showed no envy. Well, she didn't exactly praise him for it, but there was nothing in her expression resembling a harsh word or a kick. Whatever the reason, Inger had lately been a bit more lighthearted and friendly, and now she just asked, "Was it the devil himself?"

Isak nodded that, as far as he could see, it was himself.

"How did you get rid of him?"

"I went at him in Jesus' name," Isak replied.

Overwhelmed, Inger wagged her head, and it took a while before she managed to put out food for him. "At any rate, you won't be going to the woods all by yourself anymore!" she said.

She was concerned about him, which made him feel good. He made as if he were as bold as ever and not caring whether he had company in the woods or not, but this was only so as not to frighten Inger more than necessary with his uncanny adventure. After all, he was top dog, everyone's master and protection.

But Inger saw through him and said, "I know, you don't want to frighten me, but you must take Sivert with you." Isak simply snorted. "You may get sick or feel poorly in the forest, and I don't think you've been really well lately." Isak gave another snort. "Sick? Worn out and tired, all right, but sick?" He couldn't let Inger make a fool of him, he was and continued to be well; he ate, slept and worked—indeed, his terrific healthiness appeared to be downright incurable. When felling a tree on top of him one day, severing his ear, he didn't feel greatly annoyed; he picked up the ear and kept it in place with his cap day and night until it healed. When there was something wrong with his insides, he took licorice in boiling hot milk and worked up a sweat; licorice, which he bought at the store, was a tested remedy, old people's theriac. If he cut his hand he passed water on the wound, salting it, and saw it heal in a few days. At Sellaanrå they never sent for the doctor.

No, Isak was not sick. A brush with the devil could happen to the healthiest person. And Isak didn't feel injured by the perilous adventure, on the contrary, it seemed to have strengthened him. As the winter wore on and spring was no more so endlessly far away, the master and top dog began to feel almost like a sort of hero: I understand these things, just follow me, in a pinch I can even conjure!

Altogether the days were now longer and lighter; Easter was past, the timber had been hauled home, everything looked bright, and people breathed a sigh of relief after getting through the winter.

Inger was again the first one to draw herself up, she had long been in a good humor. How it happened? Ho, there was a simple reason: she was pregnant again, expecting another child. Her life was getting straightened out, nothing went wrong. It was a supreme mercy after all her misdeeds; she was in luck, persecuted by luck! One day even Isak noticed something and couldn't resist asking her a question: "It looks like it'll come to something again, how can that be?"—"Yes, thank God, I think it will!" she replied. They were both equally astonished. Obviously, Inger wasn't too old, Isak didn't think she was too old for anything; but still, another child, well! Leopoldine was now in school at Breidablik several times a year, so they had no small fry at home; and besides, Leopoldine was a big girl now.

After a few days had gone by, Isak resolutely threw away a weekend—from Saturday night to Monday morning—on a trip to the village. He refused to tell his errand when he left, but he came back with a servant girl. Her name was Jensine. "You're joking, aren't you?" Inger said, "I don't need anyone." Isak replied that now was the time when she needed someone.

Anyway, this was such a sweet and kindhearted idea of his that Inger felt bashful and touched. The girl, the blacksmith's daughter, was going to stay through the summer for the time being, then they would see.

"And what's more," Isak said, "I've sent a telegram to Eleseus, asking him to come home."

She gave a start, the mother did. Telegram? Did Isak mean to utterly destroy her with his kindheartedness? That her dear Eleseus was off in the city, in the dissolute city, had become her great sorrow. She had written to him about God, and also to explain to him that his father was beginning to be worn, and with the farm getting bigger and bigger, little Sivert couldn't manage it all, and besides, he would inherit from Uncle Sivert one day—all this she had written and also sent him travel money, once and for all. But Eleseus had become a city dweller and had no desire to return to the country; what would he do at home, he asked by way of an answer. Should he work the farm and throw away all his learning and knowledge? "To tell the truth," he wrote, "I don't want to do that. And if you could again send me some stuff for underclothes, I won't have to run into debt on that account," he wrote. And sure enough, his mother did send him stuff, she sent him stuff for underclothes remarkably often, but when she got converted and became religious, the scales fell from her eyes and she understood that Eleseus was selling it all and using the money for other things.

His father also understood. He never mentioned it, knowing that Eleseus was the apple of his mother's eye and that she wept for him, shaking her head; but one two-shaft twill web disappeared after another, and he realized that no human being anywhere in the world could wear out so many underclothes. Once everything had been carefully considered, Isak once more had to assert himself as master and top dog and intervene. It was inordinately expensive, of course, to have the storekeeper send a telegram, but in the first place a telegram would have an extraordinary effect on the son, and besides, for Isak himself, it was something out of the ordinary to take home and tell Inger about. As he strode homeward, he was carrying the hired girl's trunk on his shoulder, but he was just as proud and secretive as when he came home with the gold ring. . . .

A glorious time followed. There was no end to the good and useful things Inger wanted to do, and she would say to her husband, as in the old days, things like these: "You can take everything!"—"You're wearing yourself out!"—"Now you must come in and get something to eat, I've made waffles for you." To please him, she would say, "I should like to know what you figure to do with this timber and what you plan to build."—"Oh, I don't quite know," he replied, acting coy.

It was completely as in the old days. And after the baby was born—a little girl, a big girl, pretty and well-formed—after that Isak would have been a stone or a dog if he hadn't thanked God. But what he was going to build? That would be something for Oline to run around with again: an extension to the house, another room. There would be so many at Sellaanrå now; they had a hired girl, Eleseus was coming home, and a brand-new baby girl had arrived. The old front room would be just an extra room now, nothing more.

He obviously had to tell Inger someday, curious as she was to know, and though Inger had perhaps learned the secret from Sivert—the two of them were often whispering together—she was very surprised, let her arms fall and said, “You must be joking!” Bursting with a sense of inner worth, he replied, “How else do you expect me to take care of all the new children you’re bringing us!”

The menfolk were now quarrying stone for the walls of the addition to the house every day. They were well matched at this job, one a chunky youth as sturdy as they come, quick to see his chance, to find suitable stones; the other aging and tough, with long arms and a huge weight to bear down on the pry. When they had executed a major stunt, they generally took a breather and talked together in a droll and reserved fashion.

“Brede wants to sell,” the father said. “Yes,” said the son. “I wonder how much he’s asking?”—“Yeah, right.”—“You haven’t heard anything, have you?”—“No. Well, I’ve heard two hundred.” The father thought for a while and said, “What do you say, will this stone do for a sill?”—“It all depends. If we can knock off him this end piece, maybe,” Sivert answered, getting up; he handed the bushhammer to his father and used the sledgehammer himself. He became red and hot as he rose to his full height and let the sledgehammer fall, rose again and let it fall, twenty identical strokes, twenty thunderbolts. He spared neither the tool nor himself; it was heavy work he was doing, his shirt crept out of his trousers and uncovered his belly. He got up on his toes each time to give the sledgehammer an even wider swing. Twenty strokes.

“Let’s see now!” his father cried. The son stopped and asked, “Has he got any cracks?” They lay down to examine the stone, that madcap of a stone, a real beast—no, it hadn’t got any cracks. “I would like to try him with the sledgehammer alone,” the father said, getting up. Still heavier work, all brute force now—the sledgehammer grew hot, the steel buckled, the peen lost its edge. “She’s getting unshafted,” he said, referring to the sledgehammer, and stopped. “I can’t go on either,” he said. Oh well, that wasn’t serious, his not being able to go on.

This father, this barge of a man, ordinary, full of patience and kindness, wanted his son to strike the last few blows and split the stone. There it lay, in two pieces. “You’ve got a real knack for it,” the father said. “Hm. Bredablik could perhaps become something worthwhile.”—“I don’t see why not,” said the son. “Once the bog was drained and the soil turned up.”—“The house would have to be fixed.”—“To be sure, the house would have to be fixed, that would mean a lot of work, but . . . By the way, do you know if your mother would like to go to church on Sunday?”—“Yes, she hinted that much.”—“I see. But now we must keep our eyes open and find a nice door slab for the new place. You haven’t seen any, have you?”—“No,” Sivert said.

Then they went back to work again.

A couple of days later they both thought they had enough stone for the walls. This was a Friday evening; they sat down to take a breather and chatted a bit again.

“Hm. Well, what do you say, should we give some thought to Bredablik?” the father said. “How,” asked the son, “what do we want with it?”—“Oh, I don’t know. It houses the school and sits in the middle of the area.”—“So what?” asked the son. “I wouldn’t know what to do with it, and it’s not much worth as it is.”—“But you’ve been thinking about it?” the son asked. “No,” the father replied. “Unless Elseus would like to have the place to work on.”—“Elseus?”—“Well, I don’t know.” A long deliberation on both sides. The father started getting his tools together and shouldering them before going home. “Yes, unless,” Sivert said at last. “You can mention it to him.” The father wrapped things up by saying, “Well, we didn’t find a nice door slab for the new place today either.”

Next morning it was Saturday, and they had to be up at the crack of dawn to get across the mountain with the child in time. Jensine, the hired girl, was to come with them so they would have a godmother; the other godparents had to be found on the other side of the mountain, among Inger’s folks.

Inger was so handsome; she had sewed herself an extremely becoming calico dress, trimmed with white at the neckline and at the cuffs. The baby was all in white, with a new blue silk ribbon drawn through the edging of its robe, but then, of course, she was an extra special child; she smiled and talked already, and lay there listening when the wall clock struck the hours. Her father had chosen a name for her. That was his right, and he intended to have his say—let everyone just follow him! He had wavered between Jakobine and Rebecca, both of which were related to Isak, and at last he went to Inger and said timidly, “Hm. What do you say to Rebecca?”—“Well, yes,” Inger replied. When Isak heard that, he felt like a heck of a fellow and said brusquely, “If she’s going to have a name, that name shall be Rebecca. I’ll see to that!”

And, of course, he would come to church with the rest, to carry and for form’s sake. Rebecca would be well escorted, you bet! He trimmed his beard and put on a red shirt as in his younger years; it was during a spell of the worst hot weather, but he had a nice new winter suit and that was what he dressed up in. However, Isak wasn’t the sort of person who felt obliged to be stylish and elegant, so he put on a pair of boots harking back to the saga age for the journey.

Sivert and Leopoldine stayed at home with the animals.

They rowed across the mountain lake, and that was a great relief compared to walking around it, as they had had to do before. In the middle of the lake, as Inger was about to nurse the little one, Isak saw something gleam on a string around her neck—whatever it could be. In church he noticed that she had the gold ring on her finger. Oh, that Inger, she hadn’t been able to help it!



## XVII

Eleseus came home.

He had been away now for several years and grown taller than his father, with long white hands and a bit of dark fuzz on his upper lip. He didn't give himself airs, but seemed to make a point of appearing natural and good-natured; his mother was surprised and happy. He shared the side room with Sivert; the brothers got along well and played many little tricks on one another, which they smacked their lips over. But Eleseus had to share in the work on the house, of course, and that made him tired and miserable, unaccustomed as he was to physical labor. Things became truly bad when Sivert had to drop out and leave the work to the other two, causing his father to be poorly served, indeed.

And where did Sivert go? Hadn't Oline come over the mountain one day with word from Uncle Sivert that he was at death's door! So didn't Little Sivert have to go? It was a real mess—there couldn't have been a more inconvenient moment to part with Sivert, but there was no help for it.

"I had no time to be a messenger," Oline said, "not at all, but I've become fond of the children here and of Little Sivert, and so I wanted to help him to his inheritance."—"Was Uncle Sivert very ill?"—"Bless my heart, he's falling off day by day!"—"Was he in bed?"—"In bed? You mustn't joke about death before God's judgment seat! Sivert will neither run nor jump again in this world."

From this answer they couldn't help concluding that Uncle Sivert was far gone, and Inger insisted that Little Sivert get going at once.

But Uncle Sivert, that scamp, that joker, wasn't at death's door at all, he wasn't even in bed all the time. When Little Sivert came, he discovered a terrible disorder and squalor on the little farm, and they hadn't even done a proper spring planting, not even all the winter manure had been carted out; but there appeared to be no prospect of imminent death. Uncle Sivert was an old man, over seventy; now in his decline, he was dragging himself about the house only half dressed and often kept to his bed. He needed help for various things, such as mending his herring seine hanging in the boatshed and faring badly, but he wasn't more at his last gasp than that he ate sour fish and smoked his pipe.

When Sivert had been there for half an hour and seen how things were, he wanted to go home again. "Home?" the old man said. "We're adding to the house, and Father has no one to help him."—"Oh," said the oldster, "but isn't Eleseus home?"—"Yes, but he's not used to it."—"So, why did you come?" Sivert told him about the message Oline had brought. "At death's door?" the old man asked. "Did she think I was dying? I'll be damned!"—"Ha-ha-ha!" came from Sivert. The old man looked angrily at him and said, "You laugh at a dying man, and you're named after me!" Sivert was too young to hang his head, he had never cared for Uncle Sivert and now he wanted to go home.

"Ah, so you too thought I was dying, that's why you came running," the old man said. "That's what Oline said," Sivert replied. After a moment's silence Uncle Sivert made an offer: "If you'll mend my seine in the boatshed, I'll show you something."—"All right," Sivert said, "what is it?"—"It's none of your business," the old man replied crossly and went back to bed.

The negotiations would obviously take time, and Sivert squirmed sitting there. He went out to look around; everything was ratty and neglected. It was impossible to do any work here. When he came in again, Uncle Sivert was up, sitting by the stove.

"Do you see this?" he said, pointing to an oaken box on the floor, between his legs. This was the money box. Actually, it was one of the ordinary cases for liquor, with many compartments, which officials and other big shots took along on journeys in the old days; there were no bottles in it now, the old township treasurer used it for his accounts and his money. Oh, what a liquor case! According to legend, it contained all the world's riches; his fellow villagers used to say, "If only I had the money that has lain in Sivert's box!"

Uncle Sivert took a paper from the box and said solemnly, "You can read script, I suppose? Read this document!" Little Sivert was anything but a crackerjack at deciphering script, it's true, but he read that he was to inherit all his granduncle's property and effects. "And now you can do just as you like," said the old man, putting the paper back in the box.

Sivert didn't feel greatly moved; after all, the document told him no more than what he already knew, having heard from early childhood that he was going to inherit Uncle Sivert's money some day. It would be different if he got to see some treasures in the box. "There must be many interesting things in that box," he said. "More than you think," the old man replied curtly.

He was so disappointed and shocked by his grandnephew that he locked the box and went back to bed. There he lay dispatching various pieces of information: "This parish has had me for custodian and sole keeper of its cash and capital for thirty years, and I don't need to beg anyone to lend me a helping hand. Who told Oline that I was dying? Can't I send three men to fetch the doctor if I want to? Don't try your tricks on me. You can't wait until I've breathed my last, can you, Sivert? I just wish to remind you that now you've read the document, and there it lies, in my cashbox, that's all I say. But if you go your way, tell Eleseus from me that I would like him to come here. He's not named after me and doesn't have my earthly name, but let him come anyway."

For all the threatening tone of these words, Sivert thought them over and said, "I'll bring Eleseus your message."

Oline was still at Sellanrå when Sivert came back. She'd had time to make a turn through the common, as far down as Aksel Strøm and Barbro in their new place, and came back full of gossip and secrets. "Barbro is filling out," she said in a whisper, "it couldn't

mean anything, could it? Well, don't let it go any further. So, Sivert, you've come back? Then there's no need to ask, I suppose; Uncle Sivert has passed away? Oh well, he was an old man, an infirm old man with one foot in the grave. What—really, he's not dead? Praise the Lord, he does great things! I was talking nonsense, you say? If only I'd been that free of sin! How was I to know that Uncle Sivert lay there and lied before God? He's falling off were my words, and those words I'll confirm before God's throne some day. What are you saying, Sivert? Yes, but wasn't Uncle Sivert lying in bed smoking, telling you, with his hands folded on his breast, that he was in his last throes?"

There was no arguing with Oline, she defeated her opponent with chatter and devastated him. When she learned that Uncle Sivert had sent for Eleseus, she jumped at that as well and used it to her advantage. "Now can you say I was just talking nonsense! Good old Sivert is calling upon his kin, he's pining for his flesh and blood, he's near death! Don't deny him, Eleseus, you must leave at once so you'll find Uncle Sivert alive! I'll be going over the mountain, too, we'll keep each other company."

But Oline didn't leave Sellanrå before she had taken Inger aside and whispered some more about Barbro. "Don't let it go any further, but she showed all the signs! I suppose she aims to be Aksel's wife there at the farm. Some people are suited for great things even if they're small as the sand of the sea to begin with. Who would've thought it of Barbro? Aksel seems to be a hard worker and, of course, we don't have such big estates and farms on our side of the mountain as you've got here, you too know that, Inger, being from our parish and born there. Barbro had a pound or two of wool in a chest, it was only winter wool and I was wanting none, nor did she offer me any. Between us there was nothing but howdy and goodbye, even though I'd known her from childhood—all that time when I was here at Sellanrå and you, Inger, were away from home learning things—."

"There's Rebecca crying," Inger said, cutting Oline short. But she gave her a handful of wool.

A great speech of thanks from Oline. Wasn't it exactly as she had told Barbro, that when it came to giving there was nobody like Inger! She gave until she was numb, her fingers sore, but never a murmur. "Go see to the little angel." There never was a child so like her mother as little Rebecca. Could Inger remember what she once had said, that she wouldn't have any more children? Now she could see! No, one should listen to the old folks who have had children of their own, for God's ways are past finding out, said Oline.

With that she padded off after Eleseus up through the woods, hunched up with age, mealy-mouthed and gray and nosy, imperishable. She would now go to old Sivert and tell him it was she— Oline—who had got Eleseus to come.

But Eleseus had needed no urging, it took little effort to persuade him. Altogether, he had turned out better than he gave promise of doing; Eleseus was a decent fellow in his way, good-natured and kind from birth, only without great physical strength. His reluctance to take this trip home from the city was not without reason, he knew very well that his mother had been to prison for murder; in the city he heard no mention of it, in the backland everyone would know about it. Hadn't he for years associated with companions who had taught him greater sensitivity and delicacy than he had before? Wasn't a fork just as necessary as a knife? Hadn't he all his life written kroner and øre, while here in the backland they still were using the old dollar currency? Yes, he was quite willing to cross the mountain to another parish, for here at home he had to keep his superiority in check every moment. He took pains to adapt himself to the others, and he succeeded, but he had to be on his guard. As when he arrived at Sellanrå a few weeks ago: having taken along his light-gray spring coat even though it was in the middle of summer, he could easily have turned it so as to show the silver badge with his initials on it when he hung it up on a nail, but he didn't. The same with his stick, his walking stick. True, it was only an umbrella shaft which he had stripped of its steel wires, but here he hadn't used it the way he did in town, brandishing it, far from it; he simply carried it, hidden, against his thigh.

No wonder Eleseus went over the mountain. He was no good at carpentry, he was good at writing, which wasn't true of everyone; but there was no one in his home who appreciated this fine art, and his learning, except perhaps his mother. He walked happily up through the woods ahead of Oline, he would wait for her farther up; he ran like a calf, hurrying along. Having, in a manner of speaking, stolen away from the farm, Eleseus was afraid of being seen, for he had managed to take with him both the spring coat and the walking stick on the trip. Over on the other side he had every hope of seeing people and of himself being seen, maybe even of getting to church. And so he struggled cheerfully with a superfluous spring coat in the broiling-hot sun.

He was not missed at the construction site, quite the contrary; his father had gotten Sivert back, and Sivert was many times as useful, bearing up from morning till night. It didn't take them long to raise the walls, three of them, since it was an extension; they didn't have to square the logs, which were cut at the sawmill. And the outer boards provided roof planking on the spot. One fine day their eyes did, indeed, behold the place finished, roofed, with flooring laid and the windows put in. This was all they managed to do between the work seasons; weatherboarding and painting would have to wait.

Then Geissler came over the mountain from Sweden, accompanied by many men. His companions were mounted, riding glossy horses and sitting in yellow saddles; they must be wealthy travelers, stout and heavy as they were, causing the horses' backs to sag under their weight. In the midst of these big shots, Geissler was making his way on foot. Altogether, there were four gentlemen, plus Geissler, and two batmen, each leading a pack horse.

The horsemen dismounted in the yard and Geissler said, "There's Isak, the margrave himself. Good morning, Isak! There, you see, I've come back again as I said."

Geissler was the same as ever. Though he came on foot, he didn't appear to feel any less important than the others; true, his worn overcoat hung long and lonely down his lean back, but his face had a superior and haughty mien. "These gentlemen and I mean to go up into the mountain for a bit; they are so fat, it'll do them good to get rid of some blubber."

The gentlemen were nice and good-natured, they smiled at Geissler's words and asked Isak's pardon for invading his farm like a bunch of soldiers. They had brought their own provisions so they wouldn't eat him out of house and home, but they would be most grateful if he could offer them a roof over their heads for the night. Perhaps he could put them up in the new building?

After they had rested a while and Geissler had been inside with Inger and the children, the strangers went up through the woods and stayed away until evening. Now and then in the course of the afternoon, the folks at the farm heard some unusually loud blasting shots up in the mountain, and the company came back down with bags of new stone samples. "Copper ore," they said, nodding at the stones. They carried on a long, learned conversation and looked at a map they had hastily drawn. There was a mining expert as well as an engineer among them; one was called governor, another, proprietor. "Aerial railway," they said, "aerial ropeway," they said. Geissler threw in a word off and on, and whenever he did, the gentlemen seemed to be guided by it; they paid considerable attention to his words. "Who owns the area south of the lake?" the governor asked Isak. "The state," Geissler replied quickly. He was alert and quick-witted; in his hand he was holding the document that Isak had once signed with his mark. "You're still asking about that—the state, as I've told you before!" he said. "If you want to check on me, please go ahead!"

Later in the evening Geissler took Isak aside and said, "Shall we sell the copper mountain?"—"Well, the fact is," Isak replied, "that your honor bought the mountain from me once and paid me for it."—"True," Geissler said, "I did buy the mountain. But it's also a fact that you were to have a percentage of receipts from sale or operation; are you willing to sell this percentage?" Isak didn't understand and Geissler had to explain it to him: he, Isak, couldn't operate a mine, he was a farmer, he cleared land; Geissler couldn't operate a mine either. Money, capital? Ho, as much as he liked! But he didn't have the time, he had many irons in the fire, was constantly traveling and had to take care of his properties north and south. And now Geissler wanted to sell out to these Swedish gentlemen; they were all relatives of his wife and wealthy people, professionals, they could operate the mountain. Did Isak understand now? "I want what you want," Isak declared.

Strange to say, this great trust seemed to do the threadbare Geissler good. "I'm not so sure you'll gain from that," he said, ruminating. Suddenly he was certain and continued, "But if you give me a free hand, I will in any case get you a better deal than you could've made yourself."—"Hm," Isak began, "you've been a good man to all of us here from the beginning. . . ." Geissler knitted his brows and interrupted him, "That'll do."

In the morning the gentlemen sat down to write. What they wrote were weighty matters: first, a deed in the amount of 40,000 kroner for the mountain, next a document in which Geissler signed away every penny of this money in favor of his wife and children. Isak and Sivert were called in to sign these papers as witnesses. When that was done, the gentlemen wished to purchase Isak's percentage for a pittance, five hundred kroner. Geissler stopped them with the words "Joking apart, please!"

Isak didn't understand much of it all, he had once made a sale and received his payment; anyway, kroner were—well, they were nothing, not like dollars. Sivert, on the other hand, got a little more out of it, the tone of the negotiations appeared peculiar to him: apparently what was being settled here was a family affair. One of the gentlemen would say, "Dear Geissler, you really shouldn't be so red-eyed!" To which Geissler replied smartly, but evasively, "No, I really shouldn't. But things aren't governed by merit in this world!"

Were Mrs. Geissler's brothers and relations trying to buy out her husband, thus perhaps freeing themselves at one stroke from his visits in their homes and from a burdensome family tie? Now, the mountain was probably not without value, but it was out of the way, and the gentlemen said straight out that they were buying it in order to sell it again to someone in a far better position to exploit it. There was nothing unreasonable in that. They also said openly that they didn't know how much they would get back for the mountain as long as it just sat there. If operations were started, then maybe forty thousand was no payment at all; if the mountain would just sit there like now, it was money thrown away. But just in case, they wanted a clear-cut deal, and so they offered Isak five hundred kroner for his share.

"I'm Isak's agent," Geissler said, "and I refuse to sell his right for less than ten percent of the purchase price."

"Four thousand!" said the gentlemen.

"Four thousand," Geissler said. "Isak owned the mountain, he'll get four thousand. I did not own it, I got forty thousand. Please, gentlemen, take the trouble to think this over!"

"Yes, but four thousand!"

Geissler stood up and said, "Or the sale is off!"

They mulled it over, whispered about it, went out into the yard, playing for time. "Get the horses ready!" they called to the batmen. One of the gentlemen went inside to Inger and paid royally for the coffee, some eggs, and for the accommodations. To all appearances, Geissler was walking nonchalantly about, but he was as alert as ever. "How did the watering turn out last year?" he asked Sivert. "It saved our crop."—"You've cleared that parcel over there since I was here last?"—"Yes."—"You need another horse on the farm," Geissler said. He saw everything.

"Come now, everyone, let's make an end of it!" called the proprietor.

They all went into the new building again and Isak's four thousand kroner were counted out. Geissler got a paper, which he stuck in his pocket as if it didn't have any value. "Keep it!" they told him, "and your wife will get the bank book in a few days," they said. Geissler wrinkled his brows and replied, "Good."

But they weren't through with Geissler. Not that he opened his mouth to request anything, but there he stood, and they could all see how he stood there; perhaps he had also demanded a chunk of money for himself. When the proprietor handed him a bundle of bills, Geissler simply nodded and said again it was good. "And now we'll take a glass with Geissler," said the proprietor.

They drank and were finished. Then they said goodbye to Geissler.

At this moment Brede Olsen came walking up. What did he want? Brede had probably heard the thunderous blasting shots yesterday and understood that something was afoot up in the mountains. And here he came, ready to sell rocks in turn. Walking by Geissler, he addressed the gentlemen: he had discovered some remarkable varieties of stone, just incredible, some like blood, others like silver; he knew every nook and cranny in the mountains round about and could make a beeline for them; he knew of long veins with heavy metal—what kind of metal could it be? "Have you any samples?" asked the mining expert. "Yes." But couldn't they just as well go up into the mountain? It wasn't far. "Samples, certainly. Many sacks of them, many crates." Brede hadn't brought them with him, they were at home, he could run down for them. But it was faster to run up into the mountains for some, if they would just wait. The gentlemen shook their heads and left.

Brede followed them with an injured look in his eyes. If he had felt a glimmer of hope for a moment, it was now extinguished; he was out of luck, nothing would come off for him. Fortunately, he had a cheerful disposition, which enabled him to face up to life; he gave the horsemen a parting look and said, "Good riddance!"

But now he acted humble again toward Geissler, his former sheriff, and no longer spoke as though he were on familiar terms with him, but addressed him with due respect. On some pretext or other, Geissler had taken out his wallet and shown him how fat it was with cash. "Couldn't you help me, sheriff?" Brede said. "Go home and drain your bog!" Geissler said, not helping him a bit. "I could easily have brought a load of samples, but wouldn't it have been better to see the mountains for themselves, since they were here anyway?" Geissler ignored him and asked Isak, "You didn't see where I put that document, did you? It was extremely important, thousands of kroner. Oh, here it is, among a heap of bills."—"What sort of people were they? Were they just taking a ride?" Brede asked.

Geissler must have been very anxious, now he calmed down. But he still had enough vim and vigor to do a little more: he got Sivert to come with him up into the mountain. Geissler had brought a big sheet of paper and drew a map of the area south of the lake, whatever he had in mind. When he came back to the farm a few hours later, Brede was still there, but Geissler didn't answer his questions; he was tired and just waved his hand.

He slept without interruption till early the next morning, rose with the sun and was rested. "Sellanrå!" he said, standing in the yard looking at the wide horizon.

"All that money I got," Isak said, "am I supposed to keep it?"

"Nonsense!" Geissler replied. "Wise up, man, you should've had more! And you should really have had it from me, according to our contract, but as you could see, my circumstances didn't allow it. How much did you get? Only a thousand dollars, by the old reckoning. I'm just thinking you've got to have another horse on your farm."—"Yes."—"I know of a horse. The man who is Sheriff Heyerdahl's bailiff now is letting his farm go to rack and ruin, he finds it more interesting to travel around levying distresses. He has sold some of his herd already, and now he wants to sell the horse."—"I'll ask him," Isak said.

Geissler swept the horizon with his hand and said, "All this belongs to the margrave! You've got a house and animals and cultivated land, they couldn't starve you out if they tried!"

"No," Isak replied, "we've got all that God created."

Having scurried back and forth on the farm, Geissler suddenly went inside to Inger. "Can you manage a bit of food for the road today too?" he asked. "A few waffles again, without butter and cheese, there's plenty of good stuff in them as they are. No, do as I say, I can't carry more."

Geissler rushed out again. His head apparently in a whirl, he went into the recently completed annex and sat down to write. He had thought it out beforehand, so it didn't require much time; it was an application to the government, he told Isak with a superior air, to the Department of the Interior, he said. "I have many things to look after."

When he had got his food pack and said goodbye, it was as though he suddenly remembered something. "By the way, I believe I was a bit forgetful when I left the last time—I had taken a bill from my wallet, but then stuck it in my vest pocket. That's where I found it. I have so much business to attend to." With that he put something into Inger's hand and left.

Yes, indeed, Geissler left, seeming quite hearty. He was by no means despondent and didn't die for a long time; he came to Sellanrå again and died only many years later. They missed him every time he went away; Isak had meant to ask him about Breidablik and get his advice, but nothing came of it. Anyway, Geissler would most likely have advised him against buying the place—against buying farmland for an office clerk like Elseus.

## XVIII

Uncle Sivert didn't last long, despite everything. After Eleseus had spent about three weeks with him, the old man died. Eleseus took care of the funeral and did an excellent job of it: he got hold of a few fuchsia flowers from the cottages nearby, borrowed a flag at half mast and bought some black twill at the store for lowered blinds. Isak and Inger were sent for and came to the burial. Eleseus acted as host and was in charge of the refreshments for the guests, and when the body was sung to rest, Eleseus even said a few nice words over the coffin, making his mother feel proud, and so touched that she had to use her handkerchief. Everything went off splendidly.

On the way home, in the company of his father, Eleseus had to carry his spring coat openly; but he hid the walking stick in one of its sleeves. All went well until they were to cross the lake in a boat; when his father accidentally brushed against the coat, a crack was heard. "What was that?" he asked. "Oh, nothing," Eleseus replied.

But the broken stick was not thrown away; when they got home Eleseus looked for a suitable ferrule. "Can't we apply a splint?" Sivert, that prize wag, said. "Look here, how about putting a nice wooden lath on two sides and tying it all up with cobbler's thread?"—"I'll tie you up with cobbler's thread," Eleseus replied. "Ha-ha-ha. Unless you want to tie it up with a red garter?"—"Haha-ha," Eleseus said too; but then he went to his mother, who gave him an old thimble. He filed off the bottom and made himself a really nice ferrule for his walking stick. Oh, Eleseus' long, white hands were anything but clumsy!

The brothers would still tease each other. "Will you let me have what is left after Uncle Sivert?" Eleseus asked. "If I'll let you have it? How much is it?" Sivert asked. "Ha-ha-ha, you want to know how much it is first, you old miser!"—"Well, I'll gladly let you have it," Sivert said. "It's between five and ten thousand."—"Dollars?" Sivert cried. He couldn't restrain himself. Eleseus, of course, never figured in dollars, but this time it suited him to do so, and he nodded. And he left Sivert with that piece of information till the following day.

Then Eleseus came back to the matter. "I bet you're sorry about that gift you gave me yesterday," he said. "Don't be a fool," Sivert replied. Still, five thousand dollars was five thousand dollars and not small change; unless his brother was a louse or an American Indian, he would give back half of it. "Well, to tell the truth," Eleseus explained at last, "I don't think I would've gotten fat on that legacy." Sivert looked at him in surprise. "You wouldn't?"—"No, not especially, not *par excellence*."

Eleseus had picked up a good understanding of bookkeeping, of course. Uncle Sivert's box, the famous liquor case, had been opened for him, and he'd had to go through all the papers and sums and balance the cash. Uncle Sivert hadn't set his grandnephew to work the soil or repair the seine in the boatshed, he had entangled him in an awful mess of numbers and accounting items. If ten years ago a taxpayer had paid with a goat or a hundred-weight of dried pollack, the goat or pollack was not written down, but old Sivert summoned up the man from his memory and said, "He's paid!"—"Okay, we'll cross out that item," Eleseus said.

Eleseus was the right man for this sort of thing; being kind, he encouraged the sick man by saying that the situation looked good. The two of them had enjoyed each other's company, even cracked a few jokes. Eleseus was admittedly ridiculous in some ways, but so was Uncle Sivert; they had simply composed some highfalutin documents for the benefit not only of Little Sivert but the whole district, the township which the old man had served for thirty years. What glorious days they were spending together! "I could never have found a better man than you, my dear Eleseus!" Uncle Sivert said. He sent out an order for a whole sheep carcass in the middle of the summer, fish was brought to him fresh from the sea, and Eleseus was ordered to pay from the box. They lived very well. Then they got hold of Oline, and they couldn't have hit on anyone better for sharing a feast, nor anyone more apt to see to it that the glory of old Sivert's last days was bruited about. And the satisfaction was mutual. "I think we also have to remember Oline with something," Uncle Sivert said, "she being a widow, you know, and not well off. There will still be enough for Little Sivert." It cost Eleseus just a few strokes of the pen with a practiced hand, an addendum to his relative's last will and testament, for Oline also to have joined the heirs. "I'll take care of you," old Sivert told her. "In the event I should fail to recover and be destined not to walk the earth any longer, I wouldn't want you to pine away," he said. Oline exclaimed that she was speechless, but she wasn't; she was touched, crying and thanking him. Nobody could see such connections as Oline did between an earthly gift and, for example, "heaven's great reward in the hereafter." No, speechless she was not.

And Eleseus? If at first he may have taken a broad, cheerful view of Uncle Sivert's situation, later on he couldn't help thinking things over and saying something. He tried to make a weak protest: "The cash account isn't exactly in order, you know," he said. "And what about everything I'm leaving behind!" replied the old man. "Yes; and you must have money in the banks here and there?" Eleseus said. For so legend had it. "Well," the old man said, "no matter how that may be, what about the seine, the farm, the buildings and the cattle, white cows and red cows! I think you must be joking, Eleseus, dear!"

Eleseus didn't know how much the seine could be worth, but he had seen the cattle: one cow. It was white and red. Maybe Uncle Sivert was wandering. Nor did Eleseus understand all the old man's accounts, they had become a muddle, a tangled mass, especially from the year the currency changed from dollar to krone. The township treasurer had often counted these small kroner for full dollars. No wonder he imagined he was rich! But when everything was cleared up, Eleseus feared there might not be much money left over, perhaps nothing. Maybe less than nothing.

So Sivert could gladly promise him whatever remained after his granduncle.

The two brothers joked about it. Sivert was not upset or cast down, quite the contrary. It would probably have been rankling if he really had trifled away five thousand dollars. He knew quite well that he had been named after his mother's uncle on pure speculation, he hadn't deserved getting anything from him. Now he forced Eleseus to accept the inheritance: "Of course, you shall have it, come let's do it in writing!" he said. "I'd like you to be rich. Don't turn it down!"

They shared many a jest. Sivert was certainly the one who helped Eleseus the most to hold out being at home, it would have been much gloomier without him.

By the way, Eleseus had now become quite spoiled again, his three-week idleness on the other side of the mountain hadn't been good for him. There he had also visited the church, all rigged out, and met some girls as well. Here at Sellanrå there wasn't anybody; Jensine, the new hired girl, was nothing to look at, only a hard worker and better suited for Sivert. "I'm curious to know what Barbro, that girl at Breidablik, is like now, being grown-up and all," he said. "Go down to Aksel Strøm and find out!" Sivert said.

One Sunday Eleseus went. He had been away from home and recovered his spirit and cheerfulness again; his appetite whetted, he came and brightened up in Axel's turf hut. Barbro herself was not to be despised, she was the only one in the backland anyhow; she played the guitar and chatted away. Moreover, she didn't smell of tansy but of genuine stuff, perfumed water. As for Eleseus, he let on that he was home only for the vacation, the office would soon call him back. Meanwhile, it was fun to be home again, in the old place, where he was now staying in the side room. But it wasn't the city!

"That's most certainly true, the moors are not the city!" Barbro said too.

Aksel himself didn't amount to much faced with these city slickers, he was bored and went out to look over his fields. Now they had a free rein and Eleseus was magnificent. He told her he'd been in the neighboring parish and buried his granduncle and didn't forget that he'd made a speech over the coffin.

When about to leave, he asked Barbro to walk him part of the way home. But no thanks! "Is it customary in your city that the ladies see the gentlemen home?" she asked. Then Eleseus turned red, realizing he had offended her.

But he went down to Måneland the next Sunday too, and this time he had the stick in his hand. They chatted as before, and again Aksel was good-for-nothing. "Your father has a big farm now, he's built it up a lot," she said. "Well, yes, but then he's got what it takes to build too, you know. There's no need to worry about Father," Eleseus replied, dying to show off a bit. "It's different with the rest of us, poor devils that we are!"—"How is that?"—"Oh, haven't you heard? Some Swedish millionaires came visiting the other day, and they bought a copper mountain from him."—"You don't say! So he got lots of money?"—"A staggering sum. Well, I don't wish to brag, but it was at any rate ever so many thousands. Talking about building, I see you have some timber lying there. When are you going to build yourself?"—"Never!" Barbro replied.

"Never!" was sheer impertinence and exaggeration, of course: Aksel had quarried the stone in the fall of last year and hauled it home in the winter; between the work seasons this year he had gotten the foundation wall done, with basement and all. What still remained was to timber the house together. He was hoping to get one room roofed in already this fall, he had thought of asking Sivert to lend him a hand for a few days—what did Eleseus say to that? "Sure," Eleseus thought. "But you can have me," he said, smiling. "You, sir?" Aksel said respectfully, suddenly treating him as gentry. "You have a gift for other things." How good it felt to be recognized even in the back country! "I'm really afraid that these hands of mine wouldn't do," Eleseus remarked, acting precious. "Let me see!" Barbro said, taking his hand.

Aksel dropped out of the conversation again and went outside, leaving the two of them alone. They were the same age, had gone to school together and played and jumped and kissed one another; now they brushed up on their childhood memories with infinite superiority, and Barbro couldn't resist giving herself airs. Obviously, Eleseus was nothing like those grand office clerks in Bergen, who wore both glasses and a gold watch, but here in the back country he was a gentleman, that couldn't be denied. And now she took out and showed him her photograph from Bergen: that was what she looked like then—and now! "What's wrong with you now?" he asked. "You don't think I've lost my looks, then?"—"Lost your looks? Let me tell you once and for all—I think you're twice as pretty now," he said, "more well-rounded altogether. Lost your looks? That's a good one!" he said. "But don't you think my dress is pretty here, low-cut in the neck and down the back? And then I had the silver chain, as you can see, and that cost a lot of money; it was a present from one of the clerks I stayed with. But then I lost it. Well, I didn't exactly lose it, but I needed the money when I was going home."—"Can you let me have the photograph?" Eleseus asked. "Let you have it? What will you give me in return?" Oh, Eleseus knew perfectly well what he wanted to answer, but he dared not. What he did answer was, "I'll have some pictures taken when I get back to town, then I'll let you have mine in return." She put away the picture and said, "No, I have only this one left." Then a dark shadow flitted through his youthful heart and he held out his hand for the picture. "All right, but give me something for it now!" she said, laughing. And so he gave her a proper kiss.

Now they grew more free and easy, Eleseus bloomed and became grand. They flirted and joked and laughed, and he suggested they get on a first-name footing. "When you took my hand a moment ago, you were so lovely, like the swimming swan on the tea cozy," he said. "Oh well, soon you'll be leaving for town again and then, I suppose, you won't ever come back here anymore," Barbro said. "How can you think so badly of me?" Eleseus asked. "Hm, there's nobody holding you back?"—"No. Just between you and me, I'm not engaged," he said. "Oh yes, I believe you are."—"No, it's the naked truth."

They flirted like this for a long time, Eleseus was head over heels in love. "I'll write you," he said, "may I do that?"—"Yes," she replied. "For I don't want to be mean and do it without your permission." Suddenly he became jealous and asked, "I've heard say you're engaged to Aksel, is that true?"—"To Aksel!" she said so contemptuously that he felt comforted. "Fat chance he has!" she

said. Then she regretted her words and added, "Aksel is good enough, but . . . And he subscribes to a paper for me and often gives me presents, I won't say anything else."—"Good heavens!" Eleseus granted, too, "he can be an exceptional, first-rate man in his way, but that's not the crux of the matter."

At the thought of Aksel, however, Barbro seemed to have become restless; she got up and said to Eleseus, "You have to go now, I must see to the animals."

Next Sunday Eleseus went down a good deal later than usual, and he had a letter with him. Some letter that was! After a week's rapture and worry, it was all worked out and written down: "To Miss Barbro Bredesen. Two or three times I have now had the inexpressible happiness to see you again. . . ."

When he came so late in the evening, Barbro must surely be through with her chores in the cowshed, she might even be in bed already. That would do no harm; on the contrary, it suited him nicely.

But Barbro was up, sitting in the hut. This time she acted, as soon as he got there, as if she would no longer show him any affection, not at all; Eleseus had the impression that Aksel had worked on her, perhaps admonished her. "If you please, here is the letter I promised you."—"Thanks," she said, opened the letter and read it without any visible joy. "I wish I could write as well as you," she said. He was disappointed. What had he done, what was the matter with her? And where was Aksel? Gone. Maybe he was a bit tired of these silly Sunday visits and preferred to stay away; he could, of course, also have had a necessary errand when he went to the village yesterday. Gone.

"Why are you sitting in this stuffy hut on such a beautiful evening? Come for a walk!" Eleseus said. "I'm waiting for Aksel," she replied. "Aksel? You can't live without Aksel, can you?"—"Oh, yes, but won't he need some food when he comes?"

Time passed, frittered away, and they didn't get any closer to each other; Barbro continued to be capricious. He tried once more to tell her about his visit to the neighboring parish, and again didn't forget to mention the speech he had made. "There wasn't much I wanted to say, but I drew some tears anyway."—"Really," she said. "And one Sunday I went to church."—"What news did you pick up?"—"News, why? I was there just to look around. The parson wasn't a very good preacher, in my modest opinion, his delivery was no good."

Time passed.

"What do you think Aksel will say if he finds you here tonight, too?" Barbro said suddenly. If she had punched him in the chest, he couldn't have been more disheartened. Had she completely forgotten the last time? Weren't they agreed that he should come tonight? Deeply hurt, he murmured, "I can go, you know." That didn't seem to cause her any dismay. "What harm have I done you?" he asked, his lips quivering. He appeared very grieved, in distress. "Harm? No, you haven't done me any harm."—"So what's the matter with you tonight?"—"With me? Ha-ha-ha! By the way, I'm not surprised that Aksel gets angry."—"I'm going," Eleseus repeated. Again she showed no dismay; she didn't care about him, or about his sitting there struggling with his emotions. She was a brute.

He began to feel stabs of irritation; at first he expressed it in a discreet way: she certainly wasn't a favorable representative of the fair sex! But when that didn't help—oh, he would've done better to grin and bear it, because she went from bad to worse. But he didn't do any better either. "If I'd known what you were like," he said, "I wouldn't have come over tonight."—"So what?" she shot back. "Then you would've missed the chance of airing that stick of yours." Oh, Barbro had been to Bergen, she knew how to scoff; having seen proper walking sticks, she could now ask impudently what sort of patched-up umbrella shaft he was brandishing. He put up with it. "Then, I suppose, you'll want your photograph back too?" he said. If that didn't work, nothing would; to take back a present was the worst thing one could imagine in the backland. "Be that as it may," she replied evasively. "Oh yes," he declared boldly, "I'll send it to you as soon as I can. And let me have my letter back!"

He stood up.

All right, she gave him the letter, but her eyes filled with tears. Yes, she made an about-face—the servant girl was touched, her friend was abandoning her, goodbye forever! "You don't have to go," she said, "I don't care what Aksel thinks." But now that he had the upper hand, he wanted to use it, said goodbye and bowed out. "Because when a lady is the way you are, I absent myself," he said.

Leaving the hut behind him as he slowly walked homeward, he whistled and swung his stick, acting the big shot. Pooh! A little later Barbro, too, came walking up; she called his name a couple of times. Very well, he stopped, yes, he did, but he was a wounded lion. She sat down in the heather and seemed repentant as she toyed with a twig, and little by little he, too, became more reasonable and asked for a kiss, a last goodbye, he said. No, she wasn't interested. "Now, be as charming as you were the last time," he said, walking around her on all sides, faster and faster, to see his chance. But she refused to be charming and got up. There she stood. Then he simply nodded and went off.

When he was out of sight, Aksel suddenly emerged from some bushes. Barbro gave a start and asked, "What's this, coming from up that way?"—"No, from down below," he replied.<sup>7</sup>

"But I saw the two of you go up this way."—"Oh, you did! Well, that must've done you a world of good!" she cried, going into a rage. She certainly wasn't any less capricious now. "What are you snooping around for? What business is it of yours!" And Aksel was none too gentle. "So he's been here again today?"—"So what? What is he to you?"—"Ah, what he is to *me*. What is he to *you*? You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"—"Ashamed? Shall we hold it in or have it out?" Barbro asked, using an old saying. "I'm not going to sit around in your hut like some monument, now you know! Why should I be ashamed? If you can find another housekeeper, I'll

leave. You'd better keep your mouth shut, if it's not a shame to trouble you with that. There you have my answer. Now I'm going home, right this minute, and set your food on the table and make your coffee, then I can do as I please afterward."

They kept quarreling all the way home.

No, they didn't always agree, Aksel and Barbro. She had already been with him for a couple of years, and there had been conflicts off and on, mostly because Barbro wanted to leave. He was nagging her about staying for good, about settling down and sharing life in the hut with him; he knew how painful it would be to have no help again. This she had also promised to do more than once, and in tender moments she couldn't imagine anything else. But as soon as they fell out, she again threatened him with leaving. If nothing else, she spoke about going to town for her aching teeth. Always leaving, going away! He had to get a bond on her.

Bond? It sounded as if she was scornful of all bonds.

"So you want to leave again?" he said. "What if I do?" she asked. "*Can* you leave?"—"Can't I? You think I'm stuck because winter is coming, but I can get a job in Bergen again any time I want to." Then Aksel said, quite confidently, "In any case, it can't be very soon. Aren't you with child?"—"Child? No, what child are you talking about?" Aksel stared at her. Had Barbro gone out of her mind?

That he—Aksel himself—had perhaps been too impatient was quite another matter: once he had this bond on her, he began to act a bit too confident, which was unwise. He didn't need to contradict and provoke her so often, it hadn't been necessary to flatly order her to help him plant potatoes this spring, that he could have done by himself in a pinch. When they were married, he would soon enough know how to lord it over her, until then he ought to be sensible and give in.

But now there was this matter of Eleseus, the office clerk, a real disgrace; here he came swaggering with his refined talk and walking stick. Was this a way to behave for a girl in her condition, engaged and all! Could anybody understand such improper behavior! Until now Aksel had been without a rival nearby, but then the situation changed.

"Here are some recent newspapers for you," he said. "And then there is a trifle which I've gotten for you. You'll have to let me know if you like it." She was cold. Though they were both drinking boiling hot coffee from the saucer, she replied icily, "I bet it's that gold ring you've been promising me for over a year."

There she forgot herself at any rate, for indeed, it was the ring. But it was not a gold ring, which he had never promised her anyway, that was a fancy of hers; it was a silver ring tricked out with gilded hands, the carat marked, so it was genuine enough. But alas, that wretched trip to Bergen—Barbro had seen real engagement rings, so don't try to foist anything on her! "You can keep that ring for yourself," she said. "What's wrong with it?"—"Wrong with it? Nothing is wrong with it," she replied, getting up and starting to clear the table. "Keep it for the time being anyway," he said, "maybe I'll manage to get you another one later." She didn't answer.

Barbro really was a mean wretch tonight. Wasn't a new silver ring worth even a thank-you? It must be that genteel office clerk who had turned her thinking upside down. Aksel couldn't help saying, "Can you tell me why this fellow Eleseus is pestering us with his visits? What does he want with you?"—"Want with me?"—"Yes. Doesn't that jackass see how things are with you? Can't he tell by just looking at you?" Barbro confronted him squarely and said, "Well, you think you've got me tied down here, don't you, but that will prove a lie, I'll show you!"—"Really," Aksel said. "Yes. And I'll show you one more thing, I'm going away!" Aksel merely smiled at this, not broadly and obviously, no, he didn't want to tease her. Then he said soothingly, as if to a child, "Now you must be reasonable, Barbro. It's us, you know, you and me!"

And, of course, late in the night it ended with Barbro becoming sweet-tempered again and even going to sleep with the silver ring on her finger.

Apparently, everything would be all right.

For the two in the hut it would probably be all right, it was different with Eleseus; he found it hard to get over the hurt he had suffered. Knowing nothing about hysteria, he believed he had been fooled out of pure malice; Barbro of Breidablik had been a bit too audacious, Bergen or no Bergen!

He had returned the photograph to Barbro, bringing it over himself one night and tossing it into the hay barn where she had her bed. He hadn't done it in a crude or discourteous way, far from it. He had fiddled quite a while with the door to wake her up, and when she raised herself on her elbow and asked, "Can't you find your way in tonight?" this intimate question had pierced him like a needle or a sword; but he hadn't screamed, just let the photograph sail nicely across the floor. And then he had gone away. Gone? Actually, he'd gone only a few steps before starting to run; he was so upset, so excited, his heart pounding. Over by some bushes he stopped and looked back—no, she didn't come. Oh, he had halfway hoped she would! If at least she had shown him that much kindness! But why the devil run unless she was hard on his heels, in nothing but her shift and a skirt, crushed, in despair over herself and over the intimate question which wasn't meant for him?

He walked homeward without his stick and without whistling, no longer a big shot. A stab in the heart is no trifle.

And was that the end of it?

One Sunday he went down there again just to have a peek. With morbid, incredible patience, he lurked in the bushes, staring over at the hut. When the place finally betrayed some activity, it seemed on purpose to finish him: Aksel and Barbro came out of the hut



and went to the cowshed together. They were tender to each other now, enjoying a felicitous moment, their arms around one another: he was going to help her in the cowshed. Surprise, surprise!

Elseus looked at the couple with an expression of total loss, as if he were ruined. He may have thought something like this: there she goes arm in arm with Aksel Strøm; how she came to do that, I don't know, once she held her arms around me! There they disappeared into the cowshed.

Well, please yourself! Pooh! Was he going to lie there in the bushes and forget himself? He was damned if he would keep lying there flat on his face and forgetting himself. Who was she? But he was the man he was. And pooh once again!

He leaped to his feet and stood there. Then he brushed the heather and dirt off his trousers, straightened up and stood again. His anger and pride vented themselves in an odd way: he became desperate and began to sing a ballad of not inconsiderable frivolity. And his face had an intense expression when he took real pains and sang the worst parts even louder.

## XIX

Isak returned from the village with a horse.

Yes, the upshot was that he bought the horse from the bailiff; it was, as Geissler had said, for sale, but it cost two hundred and forty kroner, which amounted to sixty dollars. The horse prices didn't make much sense anymore, in Isak's childhood you could get the best horse for fifty dollars.

But why hadn't he bred a horse himself? He had considered it, had imagined a one-year-old colt—for which he would have had to wait a whole year, if not two. That was feasible for a farmer who had time to spare, someone who could leave a strip of bog intact till he got a horse some day and was able to cart home the crop from it. As the bailiff said, "I don't care to feed a horse; the womenfolk can carry in the hay I have while I'm away making money."

The new horse was an old idea of Isak's, an idea several years old; it wasn't Geissler who had suggested it to him. Accordingly, he had prepared himself as best he could: one more stall, a tether for the summer; he had some carts and would make more in the fall. Naturally, he hadn't forgotten the most important thing of all, the fodder: why had it been so necessary to turn up that last bog already last year if it wasn't to avoid reducing the number of cows and still have winter feed for the new horse? Now the bog was seeded with green forage. That was for the calving kine.

Oh yes, everything had been thought out. Inger had again good reason to be amazed and to clap her hands as in the old days.

Isak brought news from the village: Breidablik was to be sold, it had been announced on the church green. The modest crop, such as it was, the tufts of hay and the potatoes, would be thrown in, maybe even the livestock, a few animals, sheep and goats.

"Is he going to sell his home altogether and clean himself out?" Inger cried. "Where is he going to move?"—"To the village."

True enough, Brede was moving to the village. But first he had tried to get Aksel Strøm to let them stay with him, where Barbro was already. Aksel didn't let him. Brede didn't want for anything in the world to upset the relationship between Aksel and his daughter, so he took care not to insist, but it certainly upset his apple cart. After all, come fall Aksel was to build his new house, and when he and Barbro moved in there, why couldn't Brede and his family have the hut? No! The thing was that Brede didn't think like a settler, he failed to understand that Aksel had to vacate the hut because it was needed for his increasing herd; the hut would become a cowshed. This way of thinking remained alien to him even after it had all been explained; after all, people had to come before animals, he said. No, that was not the settler's mentality, far from it: the animals came first, people could always find a winter cover for themselves. Now Barbro stuck her nose into it and said, "Well, so you put your animals ahead of us people, do you? Good I found out about it!" In fact, Aksel turned the whole family against him because he didn't have housing for them. But he wouldn't give in. He was neither stupid nor good-natured, but had, on the contrary, grown more and more tight-fisted; he knew very well that such a move would lead to his having to feed several more mouths. Brede hushed his daughter, letting it be understood that he preferred to move to the village again anyhow; he couldn't manage in the wilds, he said, that was the reason he sold his property in the first place.

But it wasn't really Brede who was selling, it was the bank and the storekeeper who disposed of Breidablik, only that, for the sake of appearances, it would be done in Brede's name. Thus, he thought, he would be spared the shame. And Brede wasn't very much weighed down when Isak met him, consoling himself with still being inspector of the telegraph line; it was an assured income, and in time he would be sure to work himself up to his old situation as an indispensable person in the village and the sheriff's attendant. Brede, too, had been emotionally affected by the sale, of course, that was to be expected; it wasn't easy to part with a place where he had lived, toiled and worked for so many years and come to love. But goodman Brede never allowed himself to be cowed for long. That was his best point, his charm. He had once had an inspiration to till the soil, an experiment that hadn't turned out well, but he had acted in the same breezy manner in other circumstances and made a better job of it. Who could know whether even his stone samples wouldn't some day turn into a huge affair! And there was Barbro, of course, whom he had managed to place at Måneland; she would never leave Aksel Strøm anymore, that he could safely say, that was plain to everyone.

No, there was no need to worry as long as he was healthy and could toil for himself and his dear ones, Brede Olsen said. And now the children were big enough to leave the nest and take care of themselves, he said. Helge had gone to the herring fisheries already, member of a seine gang, and Katrine was going into service with the doctor. Then there were only two smaller ones left—well, a third was on the way, but . . .

Isak brought another piece of news from the village: the sheriff's wife had had a baby. Inger was instantly interested: "Boy or girl?"—"That I didn't learn," Isak replied.

But the sheriff's wife had had a child—she who had always argued against the rampant births among the poor at the meetings of the women's association: rather give women the right to vote and influence over their own destiny! she said. Now she was trapped. "Oh," the parson's wife had said, "she certainly used her influence, ha-ha-ha, and yet she didn't avoid her destiny!" This witty saying about Mrs. Heyerdahl went the round of the village and was understood by quite a few; perhaps Inger understood it too. Only Isak understood nothing.

Isak understood work, to carry on his trade. He was now a wealthy man with a large farm, but he made a poor use of the many cash payments chance had brought his way: he put them away. The backland saved him. If Isak had lived in the village, the world at

large might have influenced even him a little; there were so many fine things, such genteel surroundings, that he would have bought unnecessary things and gone around in a red Sunday shirt every day. Here in the backland he was protected against all excesses, living in clear air; he washed Sunday morning and bathed when he was up by the mountain lake. Those thousand dollars— well, a gift from heaven, every penny to be put away. What else? Isak could manage his ordinary expenses, and more, simply by selling the yield of his animals and the soil.

Elseus, of course, knew better, he had advised his father to deposit the money in a bank. It might very well be that this was the wisest thing to do, but in any case it had been postponed, and perhaps it would never be done. Not that Isak always ignored his son's advice, and Elseus was really not that bad, something he had shown lately. In the haying season he had tried to mow, but no, he would never become a master hand at that, and he had to stay close to Sivert and get him to whet his scythe every time. But Elseus had long arms and could pick up piles of hay like a real man. At this moment he and Sivert and Leopoldine, and the hired girl Jensine, were cocking the first hay of the season down in the meadow, and Elseus didn't spare himself now either, but raked until his hands were blistered and had to be wrapped in rags. He had lost his appetite for a couple of weeks, but wasn't any less fit for work on that account. Something must have come over the boy; it looked as though a setback in a certain love affair, or something of the sort, some big sorrow or disappointment, had done him a lot of good. By now he had smoked the last of the tobacco he had brought with him from town, which in other circumstances might have caused an office clerk to slam the doors and rail against many things, but no, Elseus simply became steadier from it, firmer in his posture, indeed, a man. So what did Sivert, that rascal, have to gain from teasing him? Today, as the pair of them lay stretched out on the rocks in the stream to drink, Sivert was careless enough to offer to dry a bit of extra good moss for tobacco—"or perhaps you'd rather smoke it raw?" he said. "I'll give you tobacco!" Elseus said and, reaching out, gave his brother a ducking right up to his shoulders. Ha, didn't he catch it! There was Sivert walking around with wet hair.

It looks like Elseus is turning out real well, Isak must have thought seeing his son at work. "Hm. I wonder if Elseus will be staying home for good," he asked Inger. She, with a similarly odd caution: "I can't tell. No, he won't."—"So, you've had a word with him about it?"—"Oh no. Well, yes, I've talked a little with him. That's how it looks to me anyway."—"I wonder what would happen if he had a patch of land for himself."—"How?"—"Would he work it, you think?"—"No."—"Well, have you mentioned it?"—"Mentioned it? Can't you see how changed he is? I just don't understand Elseus!"—"Don't sit there finding fault with him," Isak said impartially. "All I can see is that he's doing a good day's work down there."—"Oh sure," Inger replied meekly. "I don't understand what you have against the boy," Isak cried angrily. "He does his work better and better every day, what more can you expect?" Inger mumbled, "He isn't the way he used to be. Try talking to him about vests."—"About vests? How?"—"In the summer, he used to wear white vests in the city, he says." Isak thought about it but understood nothing. "Well, can't he have a white vest?" he asked. Isak was perplexed, the whole thing was some women's nonsense, of course; he thought the boy was right in this matter of the white vest. Besides, he didn't see the point and wanted to forget about it. "What if he had Brede's place to work on, how would that be?"—"Who?" Inger asked. "Elseus."—"Bredablik?" Inger asked. "Don't bother."

Actually, she had already discussed this plan with Elseus; she knew all about it from Sivert, who hadn't been able to keep mum. And for that matter—why should Sivert keep mum about this plan, which his father had given away solely for the purpose of discussing it? It wasn't the first time he had used Sivert as a go-between in this way. Well, what had Elseus answered? As before, as in his letters from town: "No, I don't want to throw away all my learning and be a nobody again." That was what he had answered. Then his mother had come out with her good reasons, but Elseus had rebuffed them all, he had other plans for his life. A youthful heart is past knowing, but after what had happened he found it impossible, perhaps, to be Barbro's neighbor. One could never know. He had managed brilliantly vis-à-vis his mother: he could get a better job in town than the one he now had, he could become a clerk in the office of the district governor or the judge; the important thing was to rise in the world. In a few years, perhaps, he would be sheriff or a lighthouse keeper, or he would enter the customs service. There were so many possibilities for someone with the right learning.

However it happened, his mother came around, carried along— oh, she was still so little sure of herself. The world would so easily get hold of her. Last winter she had still been reading a certain excellent prayer book which she had received on leaving the institution in Trondhjem, and now! Could Elseus become sheriff? "Yes," Elseus replied, "what is Sheriff Heyerdahl but an old office clerk in the district governor's office?"

Great prospects. His mother was simply going to advise Elseus against changing his life and throwing himself away. What was there to do in the wilds for such a man!

But why, then, did Elseus work so hard and steadily on the family farm as he was doing these days? God knows, maybe he wanted to make a point. He probably still possessed a bit of peasant pride and was loath to lag behind. Moreover, it wouldn't hurt to be friends with his father the day he would leave home again; to tell the truth, he had a considerable amount of petty debts in town, and it would be nice if he could take care of that— it would mean substantial fresh credit. It was not just a question of a hundred-krone bill, but of real money.

Far from being stupid, Elseus was rather sly, in his fashion. He must have seen his father come home and known that, at this moment, he was sitting by the front room window looking out. If, then, Elseus took special pains with his work right now, it might benefit him, without wronging anybody.

Whatever it was, a change had come over Elseus, something warped and quietly ruined; he wasn't bad, but a little spoiled. Had a disciplining hand been missing in years past? What could his mother do for him now? Nothing except siding with him. She could let herself be dazzled by her son's great future prospects and break the blow vis-à-vis his father, that she could do.

But in the end Isak became annoyed by her negative attitude, the Breidablik plan wasn't bad at all in his opinion. This very day, on his way home, he had caught himself stopping the horse and hastily making a professional survey of the neglected farm; in the hands of someone willing to put in some hard work, it could very well turn into something worthwhile. "Why shouldn't I bother?" he now asks Inger. "I have enough feeling for Eleseus to want to give him a start."—"If you have any feeling for him, don't ever mention Breidablik again."—"Oh?"—"No, because he has bigger ideas than we have."

Isak is not quite sure himself, so he cannot very well speak with authority; but he is annoyed that he has laid himself open with this plan and used such carelessly plain words, and therefore he is reluctant to give it up. "He shall do what I want!" Isak suddenly declares. And he raises his voice threateningly for Inger's benefit, if by chance she should be hard of hearing. "Yes, just keep staring at me, but that's all I'm going to say. There is a schoolhouse, it's midway up and all, so what are those bigger ideas he's got? With such a son I'm likely to starve to death, is that any better? But now I'd like to ask you something: how come my own flesh and blood can defy—well, my own flesh and blood?" Isak fell silent. He must have understood that things were going from bad to worse the more he talked. He was about to get out of his Sunday clothes, which he had worn to the village, but thinking it over he decided to stay as he was—whatever he meant by it. "Try and talk it over with Eleseus," he then says. "You'd better talk to him yourself," Inger answers. "He doesn't listen to me." All right, Isak is the boss, he should say so, and Eleseus had better come to heel! But whether for fear of defeat or something else, Isak retreats and says, "I could do it, of course, I could mention it myself. But besides all the things I must grapple with, there's now something else I have to think about."—"Really?" Inger asks in surprise.

Isak goes off again, but only to the edge of the field; still, off he goes. He's so secretive, he wants to be out of sight. The fact is that he brought back from the village today a third piece of news, one that is bigger than the rest, something enormous, and he has hidden it at the edge of the woods. There it sits, wrapped in burlap and paper; when he uncovers it, a big machine is revealed! It is red and blue, a marvel, with many teeth and many knives, with joints, arms, wheels, screws, a mowing machine. The new horse wouldn't have been picked up just today, of course, if it hadn't been for the mowing machine.

He stands there with an immensely keen expression, recalling from beginning to end the instructions that the storekeeper had read to him; he fastens a steel spring here and pushes in a bolt there, then he oils every wheel and every crevice and looks the whole works over. Never before has Isak experienced such a moment. To pick up a pen and write his mark on a document—well, that too was a perilous and difficult thing. The same with the disc harrow, which had many twisted knives that had to work together. And what about the big circular blade at the sawmill, which had to be aligned to a hair in its housing so it wouldn't flop east and west and perhaps jump to the ceiling! But the mowing machine was a magpie's nest of steel twigs and hooks and apparatus, and a hundred screws, and Inger's sewing machine was only a bookmark by comparison.

Then Isak hitches himself to the shafts and tries the machine. This was the great moment. This was why he wanted to keep out of sight and be his own horse.

For what if the machine was wrongly put together and didn't do its work, but went to pieces with a bang! It didn't happen, the machine cut grass. And why shouldn't it—Isak had been making a close study of it for hours, and now the sun had gone down. He hitches himself to the shafts and tries it again: the machine cuts grass. And why shouldn't it!

When the dew began to fall heavily after a warm day and the boys, each with his scythe, were ready to go out and mow for the next day's haying, Isak came up to the house and said, "Hang up the scythes for tonight. You can harness the new horse and bring him over to the edge of the woods."

With that, instead of walking in and having supper as the others had done, Isak turned around where he stood and retraced his steps.

"Do you want the cart, too?" Sivert asked as he left.

"No," his father replied, walking on.

He was so big with secrets and so full of pride that the backs of his knees gave slightly at each step—that was how weightily he strode on. If he was headed for death and destruction he was a brave man, he had nothing in his hands to defend himself with.

The boys brought the horse, saw the machine and stopped. It was the first mowing machine in the back country, the first in the parish, red and blue, gorgeous to look at. The father, everyone's boss, calls indifferently, oh, so casually, "Come and hitch up to this mowing machine!" he said. They hitched up.

Then they drove off, the father did. "Brr!" said the machine, cutting grass. The boys after it, with nothing in their hands, doing no work, smiling. The father stopped and looked back—well, it could've been cut more nicely. He turns a couple of screws to bring the knives closer to the ground and tries again. No, the mowing is uneven, no good, the sheath with all the knives jumps a bit. Father and sons exchange a few words; Eleseus has found the instructions and is reading them: "It says that you must be seated when you drive, then it goes more steadily," he says. "Oh," the father answers. "Sure, I know that," he answers. "I've studied everything." He climbs on the seat and drives again, and it goes steadily. Suddenly the machine doesn't cut, all the knives are stuck. "Whoa! What now?" The father down from his seat, no longer full of pride; he bends a worried and questioning face down at the machine. Father and sons stare, something is wrong, Eleseus is holding the instructions. "Here is a little bolt," Sivert says, picking it up from the grass. "Hm, good you found it," the father says, as if it were all he needed to straighten things out. "I was just looking for that bolt." But now they couldn't find the hole, where the devil was the hole for the bolt? "There!" Eleseus says, pointing.

By now Eleseus must have begun to feel like quite a guy, his being able to study the directions for use was indispensable; he pointed at the hole for a needlessly long time and said, "To judge by the illustration, that bolt is to go in there."—"Of course it is to go in there," his father said too, "that's where I put it, after all!" And to rehabilitate himself he ordered Sivert to look for more bolts in the grass. "There's supposed to be one more," he said with an extremely self-important air, as though he had it all in his head. "You can't find any more of them? Well, then he must be sitting in his hole."

The father wants to start off again.

"But this is wrong!"<sup>8</sup> Eleseus shouts. There he stands with the drawing in his hand, the law in his hand, there's no getting past him. "That spring there should be outside!"—"Yeah?" the father asks. "But now it sits underneath, you've put it underneath. It's a steel spring, it should go outside, or the bolt jumps out again and stops the knives. It says here in the illustration!"—"I don't have my glasses on me, so I can't make out the drawing," his father says a bit more meekly. "Give a turn to that spring, you who can see. But do it right! If it hadn't been so far, I would go get my glasses."

Everything is in order and the father takes his seat. Eleseus calls after him, "And you must drive quite fast, then the knives cut better. It says so here."

Isak drives and drives and everything goes well—"brrr!" says the machine. He leaves a broad swath of cut grass in his wake, it lies so neatly in a line, ready to be spread. Now they can see him from the house, and there come all the womenfolk, Inger carrying Rebecca on her arm, though little Rebecca learned to walk long ago. There they come, four women in all, hurrying in a flock toward the miracle, their eyes fixed in a stare. Oh, how mighty and proud Isak feels, sitting at ease high up in his Sunday best, in a jacket and hat, though the sweat is pouring off him! Making four wide-angled turns, he sections off a suitable parcel, turns and drives on, cutting grass; when he passes the womenfolk, they are thunderstruck, it's beyond them. And "brrr!" says the machine.

Then Isak stops and climbs down. He is probably dying to hear from the folks on the ground, what sort of things they might be saying. He hears muffled exclamations, people being reluctant to disturb him at his important post; but they are asking timid questions of one another, and these questions he can hear. And to be a friendly and fatherly boss for everyone, Isak encourages them by saying, "Well, I'll mow this parcel, you can spread the grass tomorrow."—"You can't spare the time to come in and have a bite to eat, I suppose," Inger asks, overwhelmed. "No, I have other things to do," he replies.

He oils the machine again, giving them to understand he is doing science. Then he drives off and cuts more grass. At long last the women go back home.

Happy Isak! Happy folks at Sellanrå!

Very soon he expects the neighbors from down below to be coming up; Aksel Strøm is interested, he may come tomorrow. But Brede, at Breidablik, was apt to come already tonight. Isak has nothing against explaining the mowing machine to them, and showing them how he handles it in every way. He will point out that no man with a scythe could possibly cut the grass so evenly and smoothly. But the cost of such a first-rate red-and-blue machine—well, that was not fit to be mentioned!

Happy Isak!

But when he stops the machine for the third time and oils it, his glasses fall out of his pocket! And, worst of all, the boys saw it. Was there a higher power behind this, a reminder to be a bit less overbearing? He had, after all, put on his glasses time and again when he studied the instructions on the way home today, without understanding a thing; here Eleseus had to help. Know-how was certainly a good thing to have, good Lord, yes! And to humble himself Isak decides to give up trying to turn Eleseus into a farmer in the backland, he would never mention it again. Not that the boys made much of the mishap with the glasses, quite the contrary; but Sivert, that rascal, couldn't help himself, no, he couldn't. Tugging Eleseus' sleeve, he said, "Come, let's go home and burn our scythes, Father will mow for us!" This joke went over very well.

## PART TWO

### I

Sellanrå is no longer a desolate place, there are seven people living there, all told. But in the short period the haying was going on, there also came a few strangers, people who wanted to see the mowing machine. Brede was the first, of course, but Aksel Strøm came, too, as well as the neighbors farther down, all the way to the village. And from the other side of the mountain came Oline. She was imperishable.

This time, too, Oline brought news from her own parish, she never turned up empty: old Sivert's accounts had now been gone through, and there was no fortune left after him. Nothing!

Here Oline pressed her lips together and looked from one to the other. Well, didn't a sigh pass through the room? Wouldn't the roof fall down? Eleseus was the first to smile: "How about it, aren't you named after Uncle Sivert?" he asks softly. "Yes. But I made you a present of everything he left behind," Little Sivert replies just as softly. "How much was it?"—"Between five and ten thousand."—"Dollars?" Eleseus suddenly cried, mimicking Sivert.

Oline apparently didn't feel it was the right moment for a joke, she herself had been so badly cheated; and yet, even at Uncle Sivert's coffin she had summoned all her stubborn strength and shed tears. Eleseus himself knew best what he had written, of course: so and so much for Oline, a prop for her old age—what had become of the prop? Broken over a knee.

Poor Oline, she could just as well have inherited something, it would have been the only golden gleam in her life! She had not been pampered. Practiced in evil, oh yes, used to fighting her way with tricks and petty deceits from day to day, strong only thanks to scandal-mongering, making her tongue feared, oh yes. But nothing could now have made her worse, a legacy least of all. She had worked all her life, had borne children and taught them her own few tricks, begged for them, maybe also stolen for them, but had kept them alive—a mother in straitened circumstances. Her ability was no poorer than that of other politicians; she worked for herself and her family, suited her speech to the moment and came through, gaining a cheese to bring home by one tack, a handful of wool by another; she too could live and die in reliance on insincere quick-wittedness. Ah, Oline—maybe old Sivert had remembered her for a moment as young, as pretty and rosy-cheeked, but now she is old and misshapen, a picture of ruination; she should have been dead. Where is she to be buried? There is no family burial plot, she will be dumped into a graveyard with nothing but strange, unfamiliar bones, that's where she will end up. Oline, born and dead. Once she was young. A legacy left to her now, when she is about to sign off? Well, a single golden gleam, and a bondwoman's hands would have folded for a moment. Justice would have overtaken her with its tardy reward because she begged for her children, maybe also stole for them, but in any case she kept them alive. For one moment, before darkness would once more reign inside her, her eyes squint, her fingers grope: "How much is it?" she would say. "Not more?" she would say. She would again be in the right. She had been a mother many times and had created life, that was worthy of a great reward.

But everything went wrong. After Eleseus had examined them, Uncle Sivert's accounts appeared fairly clear: the farm and the cow, the boatshed and the seine could barely cover the shortfall. That, everything considered, it went as well as it did was partly due to Oline; she was so set on there having to be a remainder for herself that she brought to light forgotten items which she, as an old gossip, knew about, or items which the auditors would overlook on purpose to avoid doing injury to respectable fellow parishioners. What a devil of a woman Oline was! And even now she didn't blame old Sivert himself; he had certainly written his will in the kindness of his heart, and there would have been ample funds left after him, but the two members of the township board who managed the case had cheated her. "But some day everything will reach the ears of him who knows all!" Oline said threateningly.

Strangely enough, she saw nothing ridiculous in the fact that she was mentioned in the will; it was an honor, after all, and no one among her equals was named there.

The Sellanrå folks took the blow calmly; as it happened, they weren't altogether unprepared. True, Inger couldn't understand it: "Uncle Sivert," she said, "who was so wealthy all his life!"—"He could have stood before the Lamb and before God's judgment seat an upright rich man, but they robbed him!" Oline said. To Isak, who was about to set out across the fields, Oline said, "It's a pity you have to leave, Isak, for now I won't see your mowing machine. You do have a mowing machine, isn't that so?"—"Oh, yes."—"Yes, that's what people are saying. And that she cuts faster than a hundred scythes. Ah, is there anything you haven't got, Isak, with your means and your gold! The parson our way has got a new plow with two handles on it, but what's the parson compared to you, and I would tell him so to his face."—"Sivert will run the machine for you, he's much better at it than I," Isak said and left.

Isak went. There is an auction at Breidablik in mid-afternoon, and that is where he is going; he will just barely make it in time. Not that Isak thinks of buying the farm anymore, but the auction is the first one in the backland, so it would be a touchy business to stay away.

When he gets as far down as Måneland and sees Barbro, he tries to just nod to her and pass by, but Barbro speaks to him and asks if he is headed for down below. "Yes," he replies and wants to go on. It is her childhood home that is going to be sold, that is why he answers shortly. "Are you going to the auction?" she asks. "To the auction? Well, I'm just going down there. Where's Aksel?"—"Aksel, oh, I don't really know. He's gone to the auction. I suppose he, too, wants to finagle some bargain or other."

How heavy Barbro was, and how gruff, furious!

The auction has started, he can hear the sheriff's announcement and sees a crowd of people. When he gets closer he doesn't know them all, some are from another district. Brede scurries about in his Sunday best, is lively and talkative. "Good afternoon, Isak! So, you're doing me the honor of coming to my auction? Thank you for that. We've been neighbors and good friends for many years, and there has never been a hard word between us." Brede is touched. "It's very strange, you know, to think of leaving a place which I've liked and toiled on and come to love; but how can it be helped when it has been thus ordained."—"It may get much better for you hereafter," Isak consoles him. "Hm, do you know," Brede replies, jumping at it, "that's what I think too. I don't regret it, not in the least. I haven't made a fortune here in the wilds, so it has to get better; the children are growing up and leaving the nest—well, my wife has got another on the way, but still." And suddenly Brede says, briefly and to the point, "I've given up the telegraph."—"What?" Isak asks. "I've given up the telegraph."—"Have you given up the telegraph?"—"From New Year's on. What was it good for? If I earned good money taking the sheriff or the doctor around on their calls, the telegraph still had to come first, didn't it? No, better to get rid of it. That's for someone with plenty of time on his hands; running over hill and dale along that telegraph line for little or no pay is not for Brede! Anyway, I had another fallout with the management."

The sheriff continues to call out the bids for the farm; they have now got up to the few hundred kroner it is thought to be worth, and so they are raised by no more than five or ten kroner each time. "It looks like Aksel is bidding!" Brede says suddenly, rushing over to him, his curiosity roused. "You want to get hold of my farm? Don't you have a big enough farm already?"—"I'm bidding for someone else," Aksel replies evasively. "Hm. Well, I have nothing against that, don't take me amiss." The sheriff raises his hammer, a new bid falls, one hundred kroner at one stroke; no one goes higher, the sheriff repeats the bid several times, waits a moment with the hammer raised and knocks it down.

"Who bid?"

"Aksel Strøm. For someone else."

The sheriff enters in the register: "Aksel Strøm, per commission."

"Who are you buying for?" Brede asks. "Not that it is any of my business, but . . ."

At this moment some gentlemen at the sheriff's table—a representative for the bank and the storekeeper's clerk, the latter standing in for his boss—are putting their heads together; something has come up, the creditors are not covered. Brede is summoned, and Brede, shallow and carefree, simply nods that, sure, he agrees, but who could have imagined the farm would come to no more! he says. And suddenly he proclaims loudly to everybody, "Seeing that we have an auction here anyway and that I've troubled the sheriff to come this way, I'm willing to sell what I've got on the place: the cart, my livestock, a dung fork and the grindstone; I won't have any use for it anymore, I'm selling every scrap."

Low bids. Meanwhile Brede's wife, she too shallow and carefree, though with a huge belly, has begun to sell coffee at a table; she is smiling, finding it amusing to be a businesswoman, and when Brede himself comes up for coffee, she tells him in jest that he must pay for it too. And Brede actually takes out his slender purse and pays. "Just look at my wife," he says to the gathering, "she's a getter!" he says.

The cart is not worth much, it has stood outside in the open for too long; but in the end Aksel adds all of five kroner and gets the cart as well. Then Aksel doesn't buy anything more, but everyone is surprised that this cautious man bought so much.

Then came the animals. They stood in their stalls today, to be at hand. What did Brede want with animals when he no longer had any land for their keep! He had no cows. He had started his farming with two goats, now he was listed as having four. Moreover, he had six sheep. He didn't own a horse.

Isak bought a certain sheep with flat ears. When Brede's children led this sheep out of the cowshed, he began bidding on it right away, attracting people's attention. Isak Sellanrå was a rich and respected man, after all, and he certainly needed no more sheep than he already had. Brede's wife stops her coffee sale for a moment and says, "Yes, do buy that sheep, Isak, she's old, but has two or three lambs every year."—"Yes, I know," Isak replies, looking at her, "I recognize the sheep."

He falls in with Aksel Strøm on the way home, having the sheep on a leash. Aksel is taciturn and seems rankled by something, whatever it might be. There is no apparent reason why he should be dejected, Isak must think, his crops are doing well, he has already brought in most of his feed, and he has begun building a house. Things are going as they should with Aksel Strøm, a bit slowly but steadily. He has got a horse now.

"You bought Brede's place," Isak said, "are you going to work it?"—"No, I'm not going to work it. I bought it for someone else."—"I see."—"What do you think, did I give too much for it?"—"Oh no. There are some fine bogs, once they get cultivated."—"I bought it for a brother of mine in Helgeland."—"Aha."—"But then I thought I could perhaps swap with him."—"Swap with him, you say?"—"In case Barbro would rather live down there."—"And otherwise not," Isak said.

They walk in silence for quite a while. "They're so after me to take on the telegraph," Aksel says. "The telegraph? Uh-huh. Yes, I heard that Brede has given it up."—"Well," Aksel says, smiling, "that's not exactly what happened, Brede was fired."—"Oh well," Isak says, excusing Brede a bit, "the telegraph can make you waste a lot of time."—"They fired him only as of the New Year, in case he should improve."—"I see."—"So you don't think I should take the job?" Isak thought for a long while and replied, "Hm, there is the money, of course, but still."—"They'll give me some more."—"How much?"—"Double."—"Double? Well, then I think you have to consider it."—"But they have made the distance somewhat longer. Oh, I don't really know what to do; there's less timber to sell here than at your place, and I'll have to buy more dead stock than the little I have. Money and cash are needed all the time, and I don't

yet produce enough butter and cheese to sell any. I think I'll have to try with the telegraph, for a year to start with. . . ." It didn't occur to either of them that Brede might improve and keep the job.

When they reach Måneland, Oline has already gotten there on her way down. Oline is truly remarkable, crawling about like a maggot, fat and round, over seventy at that, but she gets around. She's drinking coffee in the hut, but when she notices the men, she has to forget about that and step outside. "Hello, Aksel, and welcome back from the auction! You don't mind if I drop in to see you and Barbro, do you? And you're working away to build a fine big house, and becoming grander and grander! Have you bought a sheep, Isak?"—"Yes," Isak replies, "don't you know her?"—"If I know her? No."—"She has flat ears, as you can see."—"Flat ears, how? Well, what then? Come to think, who bought Brede's place? I was just asking Barbro, 'Who is going to be your neighbor down there?' Poor Barbro, she sits there all in tears, as was to be expected, but the Almighty has allotted her a new home here at Måneland! Flat ears—I've seen many a sheep with flat ears in my days. But by the way, Isak, that machine of yours was almost more than my old eyes could grasp. And what she cost you I won't even ask, for I couldn't reckon that far. If you've seen her, Aksel, you'll know what I mean; it was as if I saw Elijah's chariot of fire, forgive my sin. . . ."

When the hay was all in, Eleseus began to get ready for going back to the city. He had written to the engineer to say he was coming, but received the curious reply that times were bad and demanded curtailments; the engineer had to cancel his position and from now on do all the writing himself.

What a damned nuisance! But after all, why would a district engineer need an office assistant? At the time when he took little Eleseus away from his home, he did so, no doubt, only to show himself as a big shot to these folks in the wilds, and if he fed and clothed him till after his confirmation, he did have a bit of help with the clerical work in return for it. Now the boy was grown up, and that had changed everything.

"But if you come back," the engineer wrote, "I'll do all I can to get you a place in another office, although it may be difficult; there is such an oversupply of young men who go that way. Kind regards."

Of course, Eleseus wanted to get back to the city, how could anyone doubt it? Should he throw himself away? After all, he wanted to get on in the world! Eleseus said nothing to those at home about the changed situation; that would be useless, and besides he felt rather listless, so he kept mum. Life at Sellanrå began to have an effect on him again; it was a humdrum, unnoticed life, quiet and deadening, apt to produce reverie; he had no one to show off to, he didn't have to look at himself in the mirror. His stay in the city had divided him and made him finer than the others, made him weaker; all in all, he was starting to feel homeless everywhere. That he was beginning to like the smell of tansy again—all right! But it made no sense for a peasant boy to stand listening to his mother and the girls milking in the evening and fall into the following reverie: they're milking, listen carefully, it sounds almost eerie, a kind of song that is nothing but solo spurts, quite different from the brass-band music in town and the Salvation Army and the steamship whistle. Spurts streaming into a pail. . . .

They didn't show their feelings much at Sellanrå, and Eleseus dreaded the moment when he would say goodbye. He was now well supplied; he would again get some woven fabric for underclothes, and his father had entrusted a go-between with handing Eleseus some money as he went out the door. Money—could Isak really spare some money? That's exactly what happened, with Inger hinting that it was probably the last time. Eleseus would soon begin his upward climb and get on in the world by himself. "Hm," Isak said. The mood became solemn, the house grew still; each and everyone had had a boiled egg at their last meal, and there was Sivert, outside, ready to go down with him and help him carry. Eleseus could begin.

He began with Leopoldine. She said goodbye in return and came off very well. Likewise Jensine, the servant girl, who was carding wool and answered his goodbye. But, hang it, both girls glared at him just because his eyes might be a little bit red-rimmed. He held out his hand to his mother, and she cried openly, of course, caring not a fig that he disapproved of tears. "Take care of yourself!" she sobbed. His father had the toughest time, no buts about it, and for all sorts of reasons: he was so worn and so utterly faithful, had carried the children on his arm, told them about the seagulls and other birds, about animals and the wonders of the wild—it wasn't very long ago, a few years. . . . Standing by the window, the father suddenly turns around, grabs his son's hand and says quickly and irritably, "Well, goodbye! The new horse has broken loose down there, I see!" With that he is out the door, hurrying off. But he had himself loosened the horse on the sly a while ago, something Sivert, that rascal, understood very well as he stood outside, following his father with his eyes and smiling. And besides, the horse was just grazing on the aftermath.

Then Eleseus was finished.

His mother walked him out on the door slab, sobbed some more and said, "God be with you!" as she handed him something—"this here thing—and you mustn't thank him, he doesn't like that. And don't forget—write us often!"

Two hundred kroner.

Eleseus looked down the field: his father was having a terrible struggle knocking a tethering pole into the ground; it looked as though he wouldn't make it, although the meadow was soft enough.

The brothers entered the brush; when they got to Måneland, Barbro stood on the door slab and invited them in. "So you're leaving again, Eleseus? But then you must come in and have a cup of coffee, if nothing else." They go into the hut. Eleseus is no longer so battered by love that he wants to jump out the window or take poison, oh no. He puts his light spring coat over his knees and sees to it that the silver badge is turned up; then he pats his hair with his handkerchief and says in a perfectly genteel tone, "What classic weather we're having!"



Barbro is not at a loss either, playing with a silver ring on one hand and a gold ring on the other—yes, indeed, there she flashed the gold ring too—and she is wearing an apron that reaches from her neck down to her ankles, as though to say it is not she who is big with child, whoever else it might be. And when the coffee is ready and her visitors are drinking it, she first sews a little on a white tablecloth and then crochets a little on a collar, engaging in several maidenly pursuits. Barbro is not embarrassed by their visit, which is a good thing; it allows them to be natural with one another, and Elseus can stay on the surface and be young and flirtatious again.

“Where is Aksel keeping himself?” Sivert asks. “Somewhere, some place or other,” she replies, straightening up. “And now, I suppose, you won’t come this way anymore, will you?” she asks Elseus. “That’s highly improbable, I should think,” he replies. “Because this is no place for someone who’s used to the city. I wish I could join you.”—“You don’t mean that!”—“Don’t mean it? I know how it feels to live in the city and how it feels to live in the country, and I’ve been to a bigger city than you; so how could I avoid being unhappy living here?”—“Sure, to Bergen and all, but that’s not what I meant,” he hastened to say. Why was she so impatient anyway! “I only know that, if I didn’t have the newspaper to read, I would clear out this minute,” she said. “But what about Aksel and everything, that’s what I meant.”—“Well, Aksel is no concern of mine. What about yourself, don’t you have someone who is waiting for you in town?” At this, Elseus couldn’t help showing off a bit, closing his eyes and letting it melt in his mouth; he possibly, quite correctly, did have someone waiting for him in town. Oh, but he could have exploited this quite differently if Sivert hadn’t been sitting there; now he could only answer, “You’re talking nonsense!”—“Oh well,” she said, offended; altogether, it was a shame how cross she acted. “Talking nonsense,” she said. “What else can you expect from the likes of us here at Måneland, we aren’t that grand.”

Anyhow, Elseus didn’t give a damn about her; her face had turned grimy and her condition had finally dawned even on his childish eyes. “Couldn’t you play something on the guitar?” he said. “No,” she replied curtly. “By the way, Sivert, couldn’t you come and help Aksel with building the new house for a few days? How about starting tomorrow when you come back from the village?” Sivert thought it over. “Sure. But I don’t have the right clothes for it.”—“I’ll run up for your work clothes tonight, so they’ll be here when you come.”—“All right,” Sivert said, “otherwise not.” Barbro grew excessively eager: “I wish you would! The summer is passing, you know, and the house should be up and roofed in before the fall rains. Aksel has wanted to ask you many times, but he hasn’t gotten around to it. I wish you would do us that kindness.”—“I’ll give you as much help as I can,” Sivert said.

It was settled.

But now it is Elseus’ turn to be offended, and how. He realizes, of course, that Barbro does well to go all out, on her own and Aksel’s behalf, and seek help with the building and the gathering-in, but it is a tad too transparent; she’s not yet mistress of the place, and it’s no eternity since he himself kissed her. What a woman! Had she no sense of decency! And so he says, on the spur of the moment, “Well, I’ll come back when you need a godparent.” She glanced at him and answered angrily, “Godparent? Now you’re talking nonsense! But anyway, I’ll send for you when I need a god-parent.” What could Elseus do other than laugh a shamefaced laugh and wish himself away from the place! “Thanks for the coffee,” Sivert said. “Yes, thanks for the coffee,” said Elseus too; but he didn’t stand up, nor did he bow, the hell he would, and she was a ball of anger, sheer venom.

“Let me see,” Barbro said. “Yes, the office clerks I stayed with also had silver badges in their coats, much bigger silver badges,” she said. “Well, Sivert, you’ll stop by and stay the night, then, okay? I’ll fetch your clothes.”

That was the farewell.

The brothers left. No, Elseus didn’t give a damn about her, and he still had two large bills in his breast pocket. The brothers were careful not to touch on anything sad, such as their father’s strange goodbye and their mother’s tears. They made a detour past Bredablik to avoid being delayed and joked mirthfully about this bit of deception. But when they were far enough down to see the village and it was time for Sivert to turn around, they both acted somewhat unmanly. Thus, Sivert happened to say, “I won’t deny that it may get to feel lonesome after you’re gone.” Elseus began to whistle and to examine his shoes, then had a sliver in his finger and started searching for something in his pockets, some papers, he said, did you ever see the likes! Still, it would probably have turned out badly if Sivert hadn’t rescued them. “You’re it!” he cried, giving his brother a flick and running away. It helped; they sent each other a few words of goodbye from farther away and went their separate ways.

Fate or mere chance? In spite of everything, Elseus returned to the city to a job he no longer had, but on the same occasion Aksel Strøm found a man to work for him. They began work on the house the 21st of August and ten days later it had been roofed. Well, it wasn’t a very big house and only a few rounds high, just barely a wooden house and not a turf hut. But the animals would have a wonderful shed come winter, in what had hitherto been a dwelling for people.

## II

On the 3rd of September Barbro disappeared. She wasn't altogether lost, but she was not up at the house.

Aksel was carpentering as best he could, working hard putting in a window and a door in the new house, so he was very busy; but when it was past noon and he hadn't yet been called for dinner, he went into the hut. No one there. He got out some food for himself, looking about him as he ate; all Barbro's clothes were hanging there, she must be outside somewhere. He went back to his work on the house and kept at it a while before looking into the hut again—no, nobody there. She must have fallen somewhere and been unable to get up. He goes out to look for her.

"Barbro!" he calls. Nothing. He searches around the buildings, walks over to some bushes at the edge of the tillage, searches a long while, maybe an hour, calls out—nothing. He finds her in an out-of-the-way place, lying on the ground and hidden by the underbrush; the creek flows past at her feet, she is barefoot and bareheaded and sopping wet all up her back.

"This is where you are?" he says. "Why didn't you answer?"—"I couldn't," she whispered, her voice so hoarse it was almost soundless. "What—have you been in the water?"—"Yes, I slipped. Oh!"—"Do you feel sick?"—"Yes, it's over."—"It's over?" he says. "Yes. You must help me get home."—"Where is—?"—"What?"—"Wasn't there a child?"—"No. It was dead."—"It was dead?"—"Yes."

Aksel is slow and without spunk, he just stands there. "Where is it?" he asks.

"You don't have to know," she replies. "Help me get home. It was dead. I can walk by myself if you support my arm a bit."

Aksel carries her home and sits her on a chair. The water was pouring off her. "Was it dead?" he asks. "I've told you, haven't I?" she replies. "Where have you left it?"—"Do you want to sniff at it? Did you get yourself something to eat while I was away?"—"But what were you doing at the creek?"—"What I was doing at the creek? I was looking for juniper."—"Juniper?"—"For the vessels."—"There's no juniper that way," he says. "You just go back to work!" she warns him hoarsely and impatiently. "What I was doing at the creek? I wanted to get some twigs for a broom. Have you eaten? I ask you."—"Eaten?" he repeats. "Do you feel very sick?"—"Oh, no."—"I think I'd better fetch the doctor."—"Just you try!" she replies, getting up and looking about for some dry clothes to put on. "You've got nothing better to waste your money on?"

Aksel goes back to his work, though he doesn't get much done; but he hammers and planes a bit so she will hear him. Finally he wedges the window and plugs it up with moss.

In the evening Barbro doesn't have much appetite, but she stays on her feet and putters about, doing the chores in the cowshed and milking, just crossing the thresholds a bit more cautiously than before. She went to bed in the hayshed as usual, and the two times Aksel dropped in on her during the night she was sleeping soundly. She had a good night.

The next morning she was almost her old self, only hoarse to the point of having no voice at all and with a long stocking wound around her throat. They weren't able to talk with each other. The days went by and the episode was no longer new, other things came to the fore. The new house should really be left alone for a while, to allow the cog joints to settle and make it tight and draft-proof, but there was no time for that; it had to be made serviceable right away and the new cowshed fitted out. When it was done and the move over, they dug up the potatoes, and after that they cut the grain. Life consisted of the daily round.

But from many things, large and small, Aksel understood that the situation had become loosened; Barbro found herself no more at home in Måneland than any servant girl would have done, nor did she feel more bound; his hold on her had come unstuck when the child died. He had had this big idea—just wait until the child comes! But the child came and went. At last Barbro even removed her rings and used neither of them. "What is that supposed to mean?" he asked. "What it's supposed to mean?" she answered, tossing her head.

But it couldn't very well mean anything but deceit and betrayal on her part.

He had by now found the little body by the creek. Not that he had looked for it very much; he knew, after all, almost exactly where it had to be, but listlessly let the matter rest. However, chance saw to it that he wouldn't completely forget: birds began to hover over the place, screeching magpies and crows, but somewhat later also a pair of eagles at a dizzying height. To begin with, only a single magpie had seen something lying there and, unable to keep mum about it like a human being, had begun to chatter. Then Aksel, too, awoke from his indifference and waited for a suitable moment to sneak over there. He found it under some moss and twigs and a couple of stone slabs, in a piece of cloth, a big rag. With a mix of curiosity and horror, he lifted the cloth a little—eyes closed, dark hair, a boy, the legs crossed, that was all he saw. The rag had been wet, but had begun to dry; the whole thing looked like a half-wrung-out bundle after washing.

Aksel couldn't let it lie there in the light of day; in his heart he was probably also afraid for himself and his place. He ran home for a shovel and made the grave deeper, but since it was so close to the creek that water seeped in, he had to move it farther up the bank. In the meantime his fear that Barbro might take him by surprise and find him there disappeared; he became truly fierce and defiant: let her come, and he would make her wrap the body neatly and decently, whether it had been stillborn or not! He understood very well what he had lost by the death of this child, that he was likely to be left without help again on his farm, at a time when his herd had more than tripled. Let her come, it was the least she could do! But Barbro—it may well be that she had discovered what he was

up to; in any case, she didn't come, and he had to wrap the body as best he could himself and move it to the new grave. He placed the sod on top as before, hiding it all; there was no visible trace after him other than a small green mound among the bushes.

He met Barbro in the yard when he came home. "Where have you been?" she asked. His bitterness must have worn off, since he only answered, "No place. Where have you been yourself?" Barbro may have seen an omen in the expression of his face, for she went in without another word.

He followed her.

"What's going on?" he said, before asking point-blank, "What do you mean by not wearing your rings anymore?" Finding it advisable to give in a little, maybe, she laughed and answered, "You're so gruff that I can't help laughing! But if you want me to put the rings on and wear them out, then I'll do so." With that she dug them up and slipped them on.

But seeing, no doubt, that his face took on a foolish, satisfied look, she asked boldly, "Are there more things that you hold against me?"—"I don't hold anything against you," he replied. "I just want you to be the way you were before, all the time before, when you first came here. That's what I mean."—"You know, it's not so easy to be the same all the time."—"When I bought your father's place," he continued, "it was because I thought, if you would rather be down there, we could move. What do you think?" Ho, there he got the worst of it—now he was afraid of losing her and being left without help, with nobody to take care of the animals and the housekeeping again, that she perfectly understood. "You have told me that before," she replied coldly. "Yes. But I haven't got an answer."—"Answer?" she said. "I can't stomach hearing it anymore!"

Aksel must have thought he had gone to great lengths: he had let the Brede family stay on at Breidablik, and though he had bought the small crop when he purchased the place, he had carted home only a few loads of hay and left the potatoes for them. It was very unreasonable of Barbro to be obstinate now, and yet, instead of checking herself, she asked, as if deeply insulted, "Should we move to Breidablik and leave all my folks without a roof over their heads!"

Had he heard correctly? At first he was agape, but then he began to smack his lips as if preparing a weighty answer, which came to nothing; he only asked, "Aren't they going to the village?"—"I don't know," she replied. "Have you taken lodgings for them in the village maybe?"

Aksel still didn't want to argue with her, but he couldn't keep quiet about being surprised by her, yes, a bit surprised: "You're getting more and more callous and contrary," he said, "but you don't mean anything by it," he said. "I mean every word I say," she replied. "Why couldn't you have let my folks come here instead, can you tell me that? Then I would've had Mother to help me. But you don't think I have enough to do to need help."

This was partly right, of course, but it was also very unreasonable; the Brede family would have had to live in the hut, and Aksel would have been in the same fix with the animals. What was she thinking of, had she no understanding or common sense! "Listen," he said, "I'll get you a girl to help out."—"Now that winter is coming and there's less to do? No. You could've let me have a girl when I needed it."

Here again she was partly right: when she was heavy with child and ailing, that was the time to get a girl. But then Barbro never fell behind in her work; she was, in fact, just as quick and able as before, did what had to be done and never said anything about wanting a girl. But she should have had one. "Then I just don't understand," he said, disheartened.

Silence.

"What's this I hear," Barbro asked, "are you taking over the telegraph after Father?"—"How? Who has said that?"—"People are talking about it."—"Hm," Aksel said, "it's a possibility."—"I see."—"Why do you ask?"—"I ask," Barbro replied, "because you've left my father without house and home and now you're taking away his livelihood."

Silence.

But now Aksel refused to give way anymore. "I'll tell you one thing," he cried, "you're not worth all that I'm doing for you and your family!"

"No?" Barbro said.

"No!" he said, banging the table with his fist. Then he got up.

"Don't imagine you're scaring me," she whined in a pitiful voice and moved closer to the wall.

"Scaring you!" he mimicked her, snorting contemptuously. "But things have come to a head, and I want to know what happened to the child. Did you choke it?"

"Choke it?"

"Yes. It had been in the water."

"Ah," she said, "you've seen it? You've been there and"—she wanted to say "sniffed at it," but didn't dare to; he wasn't to be trifled with right now. "You've been there and seen it?"

"I saw that it had been in the water."

"Yes," she said, "that was easy to see. It was born in the water, I couldn't get up again, I lost my footing."

"Oh, you lost your footing."

"Yes. And just then the child came."

"I see," he said. "But you took a piece of cloth with you from home—in case you should happen to lose your footing, was it?"

"A piece of cloth?" she repeated.

"A big white rag, one of my shirts which you had cut in two."

"Oh," Barbro said, "that was a rag I took with me to carry the juniper in."

"The juniper?"

"Yes, the juniper. Didn't I tell you I was going to look for juniper twigs?"

"Oh yes. Or twigs for your broom."

"Oh well, it doesn't matter what it was. . . ."

But even after a clash as violent as this, they got on well together again—that is to say, not well exactly, but not too badly. Perceiving danger, Barbro was sensible and more complaisant. But under such conditions, of course, life at Måneland became even more constrained and intolerable, without trust, without joy, always on guard. Time crawled from one day to the next, but Aksel had to be content as long as it didn't stop altogether. He had, after all, taken this girl into his house; he needed her, had been her sweetheart, had tied his life to her—it was no easy task to change yourself and your life. Barbro knew everything about the farm: where the pots and pans were, when cows and goats were to bear, whether the winter feed was scant or plentiful, what milk was for cheese and what for consumption. A stranger wouldn't know about anything, and perhaps couldn't even be found.

Oh, but Aksel Strøm had thought many a time of replacing Barbro with another hired girl; at times she was a real demon and he was almost afraid of her. Even at those times when he was unlucky enough to luck out with her, he would occasionally recoil from her strange cruelty and her unseemly behavior. But she was good-looking and had moments of sweetness as well, and she buried him in her embrace. That was back then, now it was over. And he wasn't going to have that miserable business all over again, no thanks! But it's not easy to change yourself and your life. "Let's get married at once, then!" Aksel said, pressing her hard. "At once?" she replied. "No, first I'd better get to the city with my teeth, after all my toothaches there isn't much left of them."

And so there was nothing to do but go on as before. Barbro had no real wages anymore, but what she got was much more, and every time she asked for money, real money or small change, and he gave it, she thanked him as if it were a gift. However, Aksel couldn't understand what she used her money for, what did she need money for in the wilds? Was she saving it up? But what on earth was she saving up for, saving and saving throughout the year?

There was so much that Aksel didn't understand. Hadn't he given her an engagement ring—why, hadn't he given her a gold ring? After that last generous gift they got on well together for a long time, but it didn't last forever, far from it, and he couldn't go on buying rings for her. In a word, was Barbro set against marrying him? Womenfolk were so strange. Was there a man with a herd and a good farm waiting for her somewhere else? No wonder Aksel would go to the extreme of banging the table at women's whims and stupidities.

Strange to say, it looked as though Barbro's head left room for nothing but the thought of city life and Bergen. Good! But why, then, had she decided to come north again, confound her? A telegram from her father wouldn't by itself have made her budge a foot, she must have had another reason. And now, here she was, going around dissatisfied from morning till night, year after year. All these vessels, of wood and not of tin or iron; pots instead of saucepans; constant milking instead of a stroll to the dairy; peasant boots, yellow soap, a sack of hay under your head; never brass music, never people. Here she was. . . .

They quarreled many a time after the big clash, ho, many, many times. "Shall we hold it in or have it out?" Barbro said. "You don't remember very well what you've done to my father, do you?" she said. "Well, what have I done?"—"You must know that yourself," she replied. "But I don't think you'll become inspector, despite everything."—"You don't?"—"No, I don't. I'll have to see it first."—"You mean to say I don't have the head for it?"—"If you've got a head on your shoulders, good for you, but you can neither read nor write, and you never touch a newspaper."—"I can both read and write all I have need to," he said, "but you're nothing but a big mouth."—"There, take that to begin with!" she said, tossing the silver ring on the table. "Ah, and what about the other?" he asked after a while. "Sure, if you want to take back your rings, you can have them," she said, struggling to pull off the gold ring. "I don't give a hoot about your anger!" he declared and walked out.

And, sure enough, soon she was wearing both rings again.

In the long run, hinting that he suspected her in connection with the death of the child couldn't stop her either. On the contrary, she snorted and was arrogant. And while she never admitted anything, she would say, "Well, what if I had choked it! Here you are in the back country, knowing nothing about other places." Once when this question came up, it seemed like she tried to persuade him that he was taking it all too seriously; she herself gave no more importance to infanticide than it deserved. She knew of two girls in Bergen who had killed their babies; one of them had been imprisoned for a few months because she'd been stupid enough not to kill the child but let it freeze to death. And the other girl had been acquitted. "Why, the law is no longer so inhumanly strict as it used to be," Barbro said. "And besides, it doesn't always come to light," she said. "One of the girls employed at the Bergen hotel had killed two

children; she was from Kristiania and sported a feather in her hat. She got three months for the second child, but nothing was discovered about the first," Barbro related.

As Aksel listened, he grew more and more scared of her. He tried to understand, to make out something in this darkness, but basically she was right: he was taking it too seriously, after his fashion. With all her banal depravity she wasn't worth a single earnest thought. For her, after all, infanticide was nothing extraordinary and had no meaning, it was nothing but the moral filth and flightiness that were to be expected of a servant girl. This became apparent in the days that followed: she was smoothly and artlessly the same as ever, without an hour's reflection, unalterably full of thoughtless twaddle, servant girl from head to foot. "I have to take a trip for my teeth," she said, "and I would like to get a jerkin," she said. A jerkin was a kind of short coat which barely reached below the waist, it had been fashionable for some years. Barbro wanted a jerkin.

Since she was so straightforward about it all, what could Aksel do but calm down? Anyway, his suspicion of her wasn't always very firm, and she herself admitted nothing; on the contrary, she had time and again denied all blame, without anger, without stubbornness, but in a devil-may-care fashion, of course—as a servant girl would deny having broken a dish even though she had done so. After a couple of weeks, however, it got to be too much for Aksel; one day he stopped dead in the middle of the room and had a revelation: but good God, everyone must have noticed her condition, her big belly, her waddling gait, and now she was thin again, but where was the child? What if everyone came and started looking for it? One day they would demand an explanation. Since there had been no wrongdoing, it would, after all, have been far better to have the body buried in the churchyard. Then it would be out of the bushes, away from Måneland—.

"No. I would only have gotten into trouble," Barbro said. "They would've opened up the child and called a hearing. I didn't want that."

"If only it won't get worse later," he said.

"What are you brooding on?" Barbro asked, feeling at ease. "Let it just lie in the bushes." She even smiled and asked, "Do you think it'll come and get you? You should just keep mum and forget all that nonsense."

"Hm."

"Did I, perhaps, choke the baby? It got choked in the water when I fell. Isn't it incredible what you can think up! And besides, it won't come out," she said.

"It did come out with Inger Sellanrå," Aksel protested.

Barbro thought it over. "I don't care!" she said. "The law is different now, if you read the papers you'd know. There are lots of women having a child who kill it, and nothing much happens to them." Taking a broad view, Barbro explains it all to him, she hadn't been around the world and heard and seen so much for nothing; so here she could sit and be smarter than him. She had three main arguments which she was constantly urging upon him: first, she hadn't done it. Second, it didn't matter if she had. But, thirdly, it would never come out.

"It seems to me that everything comes out," he objected.

"M-no, far from it!" she replied. And whether from a desire to astonish him or give him courage, or even from vanity, sheer boastfulness, in this moment she dropped a bombshell: "I have done something myself that didn't come out."

"You?" he said in disbelief. "What have you done?"

"What I've done? I've killed!"

She may not have meant to go that far, but now she had to go on; there he sat staring at her. Oh, it was no grand and unflinching audacity, it was something like gossip, bravado; she wanted to be superior and win at chatter. "Don't you believe me?" she cried. "Do you remember the baby corpse in the Stadt Sea? I was the one who threw it there!"

"What?" he said.

"That baby corpse. You don't remember anything. We read about it in the paper."

After a while he burst out, "You must be crazy!"

But his confusion seemed to whet her appetite and give her a sort of odd strength, so that she could relate the details. "I had it in my trunk—well, it was dead, I took care of that the moment it was born. And when we got to the Stadt Sea I threw it overboard."

He sat there dark and silent, but she was still talking. This was long ago, several years ago, at the time when she first came to Måneland. So he could see that not everything came out, far from it. What did he think it would be like if everything people did came to light! How about married folks in the cities and all the things they did? They killed their children before they were born, there were doctors for that. They didn't want more than one child, or at most two, and so the doctor made a little opening in the womb. So Aksel could take it from her that this was not a big deal in the world at large.

"Hm, then I suppose you finished off your last child, too?" Aksel said.

"M-no," she replied with the utmost indifference. "I didn't have to do that," she said. But she got back once more to the point that it wouldn't have mattered if she had. She seemed accustomed to facing the question squarely, and that had made her indifferent. The

first time around it may have felt a little spooky, a wee bit alien to her, to kill a child, but the second time? She could view her deed in a sort of historical perspective: it had been done and it is done.

Aksel went out, his head feeling heavy. He wasn't very much concerned with the fact that Barbro had killed her first child, he had nothing to do with that. And he couldn't find much fault with her having had the child in the first place; she was no innocent, nor had she pretended to be. On the contrary, she had made no secret of her experience and taught him many a dark game. Good. But he hadn't wanted the last child to be lost, a baby boy, a little white creature wrapped in a rag. If she was to blame for the death of this child, then she had done him wrong, had done Aksel wrong, broken a bond which was valuable to him and could never be replaced. But he might be doing her an injustice, of course: she could have lost her footing in the creek and not been able to get up again. Though there was that rag, that half shirt she had taken with her—.

But the hours went by now as well, afternoon came and was followed by evening. And when Aksel had gone to bed and had stared into the dark long enough, he fell asleep and slept till morning. Then came a new day, and after that there were other days.

Barbro was the same as ever. Knowing so much about the world, she treated with indifference, as trifles, things that were dangerous and scary in the wilds. In a way this was comforting, she was clever for both of them, carefree for both. And by the way, she did not give the appearance of being dangerous herself. Barbro a monster? Not a bit. On the contrary, she was an attractive girl, blue-eyed, slightly snub-nosed, handy at work. Though she was utterly sick and tired of the farm and the wooden vessels, which needed so much scrubbing, and perhaps tired of Aksel, too, and of the accursed seclusion in which she lived, she didn't kill any of the animals and never stood over Aksel himself with a raised knife in the middle of the night.

Just one more time it happened that they got to talking about the dead child in the woods. He again expressed the opinion that it ought to have been buried in the churchyard, with a graveside ceremony, but she maintained as before that her way was good enough. Whereupon she said something which showed that she, too, could reason—ho, she was quick-witted, able to see beyond her knitting needles, thinking with her miserable little pygmy brain: "And if it comes out, I'll talk to the sheriff; I've been in service in his house, Mrs. Heyerdahl will help me. It's not everyone who can say this much, and even so they get acquitted. And besides, Father is on good terms with the big shots and is bailiff and all."

Aksel just shook his head.

"You're doubtful?"

"What do you think your father can accomplish?"

"A fat lot you know about that!" she shouted angrily. "Unless you managed to ruin him when you took away his farm and his livelihood."

She appeared to have a sort of notion that her father's reputation had suffered lately and that this might be to her detriment. What could Aksel say to that? Nothing. He was a man of peace, a working man.

### III

With winter on the way, Axel Strøm found himself alone once more at Måneland; Barbro had left. Yes, that was the end of it.

Her trip to town wouldn't take very long, she said, it was not like going to Bergen. She wasn't going to stay around and lose one tooth after another, until she had a mouth like a calf. "What would it cost?" Aksel asked. "How can I know!" she replied. "Anyway, it won't cost you anything, I'll earn the money."

She had explained why she had better do the trip right now: there were only two cows to milk, come spring the other two would calve and all the goats kid; then came the spring planting, which meant working against time until late June again. "Do as you like," Aksel said.

It wasn't going to cost him any, not at all. Still, she must have some money, just a trifle; there was the travel and the dentist to pay, and besides she needed money for a jerkin and various other things. But let that go if it didn't suit him. "You've gotten quite a bit of money already," he said. "Oh well," she replied. "In any case, it's gone."—"Haven't you saved up some?"—"Saved up? You're welcome to look into my box. I didn't save up any in Bergen, when I had much bigger wages."—"I don't have any money for you," he said.

He wasn't very confident that she would ever return from this trip, and she had tired him out for so long with her obstinacy in every way that he was beginning to feel indifferent toward her. But though she didn't manage to wrest any money worth mentioning from him, he winked at her preparing a huge food pack, and he drove both her and her box down to the packet boat in the village.

Then it was done.

He could have managed alone on the farm again, being used to it from before, but he was very much tied down because of the animals, and when he had to be away from home they were neglected. The storekeeper had advised him to get Oline to come for the winter, she had been at Sellanrå for several years at one time; she was old now, but vigorous and hard-working. Well, Oline was sent for, but she hadn't come, and he hadn't heard from her.

While Aksel waits, he works in the forest cutting firewood, threshes his modest crop of grain and tends the animals. It was a quiet and lonely life. Now and then Sivert Sellanrå would drive by on his way to and from the village; going down, he had loads of wood or skins or butter and cheese, but coming home again he was almost always without a load. There were so few things the Sellanrå farm needed to buy.

Now and then Brede Olsen, too, rushed past Måneland, lately more often than before—whatever he was rushing about for so persistently. It looked as though he was trying to make himself indispensable on the telegraph line during the last few weeks of his tenure and perhaps manage to keep his job. After Barbro left, he never dropped in at Aksel's anymore but went straight past, which showed a somewhat excessive arrogance on his part, since he was still living at Breidablik and had not moved out. One day when he was about to pass by without even a word of greeting, Aksel stopped him and asked when he had thought of vacating the place. "How did you part from Barbro?" Brede asked in return. One word led to another. "You sent her off with no money whatever, she was scarcely able to make her way to Bergen."—"So, she's in Bergen?"—"Yes, she finally got there, she writes, but not thanks to you."—"I'll throw you out of Breidablik right now," Aksel said. "If only you would be so kind!" the other replied scornfully. "But after the new year we'll throw ourselves out," he said and went off.

So, Barbro had gone to Bergen, as Aksel had suspected. It caused him no grief—grief? Far from it, she was simply a monster; but until now he hadn't abandoned all hope that she might come back. Who the hell could understand it! He must have gotten a bit too stuck on this creature, this inhuman creature, all the same. She did have her sweet moments, unforgettable moments, and it was precisely to prevent her from escaping all the way to Bergen that he had been so stingy with money when she said goodbye. And now she had escaped, in spite of everything. A few pieces of clothing were still hanging there after her, and a straw hat with a bird's wing wrapped in a piece of paper was left in the attic; but she didn't come to pick them up. Well, maybe he did grieve a little. Her newspaper, which continued to arrive, now seemed like a huge mockery and an insult, and it probably wouldn't stop coming until the new year.

Anyhow, Aksel had something else to think about; he had to be a man.

Come spring, he meant to put up a shed at the north wall of the new house, and he had to fell the timber this winter and get the planks cut. Aksel lacked a proper logging woods, but there were some huge pines scattered about here and there in the outlying parts of his property; he decided to cull the trees on the Sellanrå side, so the haulage to the sawmill wouldn't be too long.

One morning he feeds the animals a bit extra, to tide them over until the evening, closes the doors after him and makes for the woods; beside his ax and a food bag, he carries a snow shovel. The weather is mild; yesterday there was a heavy snowstorm, but today it doesn't snow. He follows the telegraph line till he gets to the place, throws off his jacket and sets to work. As he fells the trees, one after another, he trims them, turning them into logs, then heaps up the twigs and the toppings.

Brede Olsen passes by on his way up, so the line must be out of order after yesterday's storm. Or maybe Brede wasn't there to do a job but was acting out of pure zeal—ho, he had certainly improved. The men didn't talk to or greet each other.

Aksel is quite aware that the weather is changing, the wind rising more and more, but he just keeps working. It's long past noon and he hasn't yet eaten. The next moment a huge pine that he fells throws him to the ground as it falls. How it happened? By accident. A large pine is swaying on the stump, the man wants to push it one way, the storm another, the man loses. He might still have been all right, but the snow had covered the rough terrain and Aksel missed his footing; stepping sideways, he got his leg caught in a rocky cleft: he was stuck between rocks up to his crotch, with a large tree on top of him.

Just so. He might still have been all right, but he had landed in an agonizingly awkward position; while no bones were broken as far as he could tell, he was all twisted and unable to work his way from under the great weight. After a while he has freed one hand, the other is caught under him; he cannot reach the ax. He looks about him and thinks, as any other trapped creature would have done, looks about him and thinks and struggles under the tree. Brede is bound to come back down before long, he thinks and takes a breather.

At first he takes it lightly and is only annoyed at being held up by this accident, this accursed turn of events; he is not in the least concerned about his health or let alone his life. True enough, he can feel that the hand he lies on is dying away under him and that the leg in the rocky cleft is turning cold and fading away too, but let that pass. Brede is bound to come any time now.

Brede did not come.

With the storm increasing, Aksel's face was lashed by the blowing snow. Well, now it's beginning in earnest! he must be thinking to himself, still fairly unconcerned; it is as though he winks at himself through the snow that now he must watch out, for now it's beginning in earnest. After a long while he lets out a yell. It isn't likely to carry very far in this strong gale, but it will pass up along the line, to Brede. Aksel lies there with perfectly useless thoughts in his head: if only he could reach the ax and maybe chop himself free! If he could just pull up his hand, which was squeezed up against something sharp, a stone; the stone was eating its way into the back of his hand, slowly and politely. If at least that damn stone were gone, but nobody has yet seen fit to tell us that a stone has ever made a touching move.

It's getting late, with whirling snow everywhere, burying Aksel under it; he is so helpless, the snow settles, innocent and unaware, on his face. For a moment it melts, then his face cools and the snow doesn't melt anymore. Now it really begins in earnest!

Then he lets out two loud yells and listens.

His ax is getting snowed under, he can see only a bit of the handle now. Over there, in a tree, hangs his food bag; he would certainly help himself to a bite, to several whopping mouthfuls, if only he could reach it. And while he is about it, boldly confessing his vital needs, he could also wish he had his jacket on, it's getting cold. He lets out another mighty yell.

There is Brede. He has stopped; looking over at the shouting man, he stands a mere second glancing that way, as if to find out what's up. "Can you come and hand me the ax?" Aksel calls pitifully. Brede withdraws his eyes; seeing what's up, he glances into the air, up at the telegraph cable, and seems on the point of whistling. Was he out of his mind! "Come and hand me the ax," Aksel repeats in a louder voice, "I have a tree on top of me!" Brede is so improved and so zealous, he keeps looking at the telegraph cable, whistling all the while. And note carefully: he may even be capable of whistling cheerfully and vindictively. "Ah, you want to put an end to me, you won't even give me the ax!" Aksel cries. Then it looks as though Brede must go a bit farther down the line and see to the cable. He disappears in the driving snow.

Oh well. But what if Aksel could turn the trick, and a damn neat trick it would be, of freeing himself sufficiently to reach the ax! To ease the huge weight that holds him down, he tightens his stomach and chest; he moves the tree, shakes it, but manages only to get some more snow on top of him. After a few futile efforts he stops.

It begins to get dark. Brede is gone, but how far can he have gotten? Not very far. Aksel shouts again, at the same time speaking his mind: "You murderer, are you just going to leave me here?" he cries. "Is that how little you care about your soul's salvation? You know you could have a cow for giving me a helping hand, but you're a swine, Brede, you want to put an end to me. But I'll report you, as sure as I'm lying here, remember that! Can't you just come and give me the ax?"

Silence. Aksel struggles again under the tree, lifts it a little with his stomach and makes it bury him even deeper in snow. Then he resigns himself and sighs; by now he is both tired and sleepy. And the cattle will be mooing in the hut, they haven't had either food or drink since this morning. Barbro isn't there to feed them anymore, she ran off and is gone, with both her rings to boot. It's getting dark, well, evening and night are coming on, but let that pass; worse, it's cold, his beard is freezing and soon his eyes will ice over as well. It would've been nice to have the jacket over there in the tree, and how can it be—one of his legs feels dead to the hip! "It's all in God's hands," he says to himself, and it actually sounds as if he can speak devoutly if he wants to. It's getting dark—all right, he can die without the lamp being lighted! He feels so soft and good, and to show he is humble he puts up a nice foolish smile at the storm: it's God's own snow, innocent snow! Why, he might even forget about reporting Brede.

He quiets down, growing more and more sleepy, as if paralyzed by poison; there is so much whiteness before his eyes, forests and plains, great wings, white veils, white sails, white, white—what can it be? Nonsense! He knows well enough it is snow; he is lying in the woods, it is not a mere fancy that he is buried under a tree.

He calls out at random again, bellowing—lying down there in the snow, his powerful hairy chest is bellowing, loud enough to be heard in the hut, by the animals, bellowing time and time again. "And what a dirty swine, a real monster, you are," he calls after Brede, "have you considered what you're doing, letting me perish? Can't you bring yourself to give me the ax, I ask you, unless you are an infamous beast and not a human being? But good riddance, if you really mean to abandon me like this."



He must have slept, he is so stiff and lifeless, but his eyes are open, buried in ice but open, though he can't blink; has he been sleeping with open eyes? Maybe he dropped off for a minute, or an hour, God knows, but now Oline is here. He can hear her asking, "By Christ's holy wounds, are you alive?" And further she asks if he's the one lying there, and if he has gone out of his mind. Anyway, Oline is here.

Yes, Oline has a way of nosing things out, like a jackal; she emerges when some horror is at hand, her sense of smell is so sharp. How could Oline have made her way in life if she hadn't followed her nose and had an eye to the main chance? She had received Aksel's message and come over the mountain, with her seventy years and all, to stay with him. Was weather-bound at Sellanrå yesterday during the storm, came to Måneland today, found nobody at home, fed the animals, listened out on the door slab on and off, did the evening milking, listened again and just couldn't understand—.

Then she hears someone calling and Oline nods: it's either Aksel or the hillfolk, and whether one or the other she'd better sniff about a bit, to find the Almighty's eternal wisdom behind this great disturbance in the forest—and me he will never harm, for I'm not worthy to unloose the latchet of his shoes.

Here she stands.

The ax? Oline digs and digs in the snow but can't find the ax. Thinking she can manage without an ax, she tries to lift the tree but is no better than a child and only shakes the outermost branches. She looks for the ax again—it's dark, but she digs with hands and feet; Aksel cannot point, he can only say where the ax lay before, but it's no longer there. "If only it hadn't been so far to Sellanrå!" Aksel says. But now Oline begins to search in her own way, and Aksel calls out to her that, no, that's not where it is. "All right," Oline says, "I just want to look everywhere. And what's this?" she asks. "You found it, didn't you?" Aksel says. "Yes, with the help of the Almighty!" Oline replies grandiloquently. But Aksel doesn't feel very grand; he admits he may not be fully in his right mind, he's almost done for. And what did Aksel want with the ax? He couldn't move, Oline had to cut him free. Oh, Oline had used an ax before, she had chopped firewood for many an evening in her lifetime.

Aksel cannot walk; one leg is dead to the hip, there is something wrong with his back, and the sharp stitches trigger some odd squeals. All in all, he feels like a mere remnant of himself, part of him has been left behind under the tree. "It's so strange," he says, "I just can't understand." Oline understands and explains it all with miraculous words, for she has saved a man from death and knows it. The Almighty has used her as a humble instrument, deciding not to send a heavenly host. Didn't Aksel see his wise counsel and decision? And if he had wanted to send a serpent into the ground, he could've done it. "Yes, I know," Aksel says, "but I feel so funny."—"Funny?" He should wait a little bit, move, bend and straighten up, "yes, that's it, a little at a time." His limbs had withered and were dead, he had to put on his jacket and get warm. But never would she forget how the angel of the Lord called her out on the door slab that last time, when she heard shouts coming from the forest. "It was as in the days of paradise, when they blew with trumpets on the walls of Jericho—."

Miraculous. But during this speech Aksel has some time for himself, to exercise his limbs and learn to walk again.

Slowly they make their way homeward, with Oline continuing to be his rescuer and support. It works well enough. A little down below they run across Brede. "What's up?" Brede says. "Are you feeling poorly? Shall I help you?" he says. Aksel remains silent, refusing his offer. He has promised God not to take revenge on Brede and report him, but he hasn't gone any further. And why was Brede on his way up again? Had he seen that Oline had come to Måneland and understood that she would have heard the cries of distress? "Oh, it's you, Oline?" Brede says, eager to talk. "Where did you find him? Under a tree? Well, strange things will happen to a person," he exclaims, "I was inspecting the cable and then I heard someone call. And no one could've turned around faster than Brede—I wanted to lend a hand if necessary. And then it was you, Aksel! Were you lying under a tree?"—"Yes, as you could both see and hear when you came on down," Aksel replies, "but you passed me by."—"God be merciful to me a sinner!" Oline cries out at so much blackness. Brede explains himself: "Saw you, yes. I saw you very well. But you could've called, why didn't you call? I saw you perfectly well, but I thought you were taking a little rest."—"You just shut up!" Aksel warns him, "you wanted me to lie there and never rise again!"

Now Oline understands that Brede mustn't meddle, it will lessen her own indispensability and make her rescue less absolute. She hinders Brede from helping, he isn't even allowed to carry the food bag or the ax. Yes, for the moment Oline sides completely with Aksel; the next time she drops in on Brede and is offered a cup of coffee, she will side with him. "Can't you let me carry the ax and the snow shovel at least?" Brede says. "No," Oline answers in Aksel's place, "he wants to carry them himself."—"You could've called to me," Brede goes on, "we aren't on such bad terms that you couldn't have found your tongue. You did call? Well, you should've hollered, there was a snowstorm, remember. And besides, you could've waved your hand."—"I had no hand to wave with," Aksel replies, "you saw how I lay there, like being locked up."—"No, that I didn't see. Well, I never heard the likes of it! Let me carry your things, do you hear?"—"You must leave Aksel alone," Oline says. "He feels poorly."

But now Aksel's brain must have started working again too. He has heard about old Oline before, and understands that she will be both expensive and troublesome for all time if she can claim to have saved his life single-handedly, so he tries to apportion the triumph somewhat. Brede does, indeed, get to carry the food bag and the tools, Aksel even drops a word to the effect that it was a relief, it felt good. But Oline won't have it; tearing at the bag, she declares that she and no one else shall carry what has to be carried. Sly simplicity is putting up a fight on every side. Aksel is left without support for a moment, and Brede has to let go of the bag and catch him, though he is not wobbly anymore.

They continue that way, with Brede supporting the feeble man and Oline carrying his things. She carries and carries, full of spite and flashing sparks: she has managed to wangle only the lowliest and crudest role in bringing Aksel safely home. What the hell was Brede doing here? "Brede," she says, "what am I hearing, have they sold your farm, just like that?"—"Who wants to know?" Brede replies boldly. "Wants to know? I wasn't aware you wanted to keep it a secret."—"It's a pity, Oline, that you didn't turn up and bid for the farm."—"Me? You're making fun of a poor devil!"—"But haven't you grown rich? They say you've inherited old Sivert's money box, heh-heh-heh." It didn't make Oline any friendlier to be reminded of the abortive legacy. "Yes, old Sivert didn't begrudge me anything, that's for sure. But once he was dead they stripped him clean of worldly goods. You know yourself, Brede, how it feels to be completely broke and live under another man's roof; but now old Sivert has large halls and pavilions for himself, while you and I, Brede, are left here on earth at the mercy of everyone."—"I don't care to listen to you," Brede says, whereupon he turns to Aksel: "I'm glad I came so I could help you get home. Do I walk too fast for you?"—"No."

But to fight with Oline, wrangle with Oline? Impossible. She never gave in. And nobody could match her in mixing heaven and earth into a big muddle of kindness and malice, nonsense and poison. Now she hears it's really Brede who is helping Aksel get home! "Come to think," she begins, "those high gentlemen who came to Sellanrå that time—did you get to show them those sacks of stones of yours?"—"If you wish, Aksel, I can just as easily take you on my back and carry you," Brede says. "No," Aksel replies. "But many thanks, anyway."

They walk and walk and there is only a short way left. Oline understands she must make the most of her time if she is to accomplish anything. "It would've been better if you'd saved Aksel from death," she says. "And how was it, Brede, did you see his destruction and hear his cries of distress and walk straight by?"—"You just keep your mouth shut, Oline!" Brede replies.

That would, in fact, have made it easier on her, as she was wading in deep snow, carrying a heavy load and breathing hard; but she did anything but stop talking. She seemed to have kept a juicy morsel in reserve, oh, a dangerous subject, and should she venture to broach it? "Barbro, now," she says—"well, she hasn't run away, has she?"—"Yes," Brede answers thoughtlessly. "And left you a job for the winter." But this gave Oline an opening again: she could give him to understand how sought-after she was, how Oline was wanted all over the parish. Couldn't she have been in two places, well, for that matter, in three places? They also would've wanted to have her in the parsonage. And at the same time she gave him to understand one more thing, which even Aksel could hear, it wouldn't do any harm: she had been offered so and so much for the winter, to say nothing of a new pair of shoes and, on top of it, winter feed for a sheep. But then she knew that here at Måneland she came to an uncommonly fine man who would pay her plentifully, and so she would rather come here. No, Brede shouldn't trouble himself about her; up to now, her heavenly father had opened door after door for her and invited her in. And it almost looked as though God had had a purpose in sending her here to Måneland, she had saved a life this evening.

But now Aksel is getting exhausted, and his legs are not to be trusted. It is a marvel how, as warmth and life have gradually returned to his limbs, he has become better at walking, but now he badly needs Brede's help to keep on his legs. It seemed to begin when Oline talked about her wages, and later, when she was saving his life again, it got really bad. Was he trying to lessen her triumph once again? God knows, but his brain was apparently in perfect working order. When they get near his place, he stops and says, "Why, it looks like I won't manage to get home, after all." Without further ado, Brede takes him on his back. Then they go on like that, Oline all venom, Aksel at full length on Brede's back. "But how was it," Oline asks, "wasn't Barbro going to have a child?"—"A child?" Brede groans under his weight. It is an extremely odd procession, but Aksel lets himself be carried all the way, until he is deposited on his door slab.

Brede is panting heavily. "Or didn't she have a child?" Oline asks. Aksel quickly cuts in with the following words to Brede: "I don't see how I could've gotten home alive tonight if it hadn't been for you." Nor does he forget Oline: "Many thanks, Oline, you were the first to find me. Many thanks to both of you!"

This was the evening Aksel was saved. . . .

The next few days Oline was loath to speak about anything but the great event. Aksel had his hands full trying to hold back. Oline can point out the very spot where she was standing in the room when the angel of the Lord called her out on the door slab to listen for cries for help; Aksel has other things on his mind again and must act like a man. He resumes his work in the woods, and when he is through with the felling he starts hauling the logs to the sawmill at Sellanrå.

An ordinary, suitable winter job as long as it lasts: logs going up, cut boards back down. But it is necessary to keep at it and finish before the new year, when the big frost sets in and the mill ices up. It goes really well, everything goes. When Sivert Sellanrå happens to come from the village without a load, he too hauls a log up on his sledge, helping his neighbor. Then the two of them get to have a regular chat and enjoy each other's company.

"What is new in the village?" Aksel asks. "Oh, nothing," Sivert replies. "There's a new man coming upcountry."

A new man—oh, that was not nothing, it was just Sivert's way. Every few years new men came up and settled down, there were now five new homesteads below Breidablik. Higher up the colonizing went more slowly, though the ground was less bog and more mold all the way south. The settler who had ventured farthest up in the common was Isak, when he staked out Sellanrå; he was the boldest and the wisest of them. After him came Aksel Strøm, and now a new man had bought a lot. The new man was to have a big parcel of tillable land and forest down below Måneland—there was plenty to choose from.

"Have you heard what sort of man he is?" Aksel asks. "No," Sivert replies. "He comes with ready-made buildings which he hauls up here and puts up in no time."—"I see. Then he must be a man of means?"—"Looks like it, all right. He's coming with his family,

a wife and three kids. And he has a horse and cattle with him.”—“Then he must have money,” Aksel says. “That’s all you heard?”—“Yes. He’s thirty-three years old.”—“What’s his name?”—“Aaron,” they said. “He has called his place Storborg.”—“Hm, Storborg. Well, that’s quite something.”—“He is from down the coast. They say he’s been fishing.”—“Then only time will tell if he’ll be any good at farming,” Aksel says. “You heard nothing more about him?”—“No. He paid cash when he signed the deed. That’s all I heard. He must’ve made big money fishing, they said. Now he wants to settle down here and trade.”—“Oh, he’ll trade?”—“Yes, so they said.”—“Hm, he’ll trade!”

This was the most important news of all, and the two neighbors talked it over in every possible way as they hauled the timber up. It was big news, perhaps the biggest news in the area’s entire history, so there was plenty to discuss. Who was this new man going to trade with? The eight new farms in the common? Or did he expect to get customers from the village as well? Anyway, the store would be important; it might also increase the colonization and cause the properties to rise in value, though nobody knew.

They discussed it back and forth, never tiring. These two men had interests and goals that were just as important as those of others; the settlements were their world, work, the seasons, and crops the adventures that came their way. Wasn’t there excitement in that? Ho, excitement galore! Many a time they had to sleep lightly, many a time work past mealtime, but they could stand it, they had the health for it—seven hours under a fallen pine tree did not cause lifelong damage as long as their limbs were whole. A narrow world, without vistas? Indeed! But what vistas would Storborg offer, with trade in the middle of the wilds!

People discussed it until Christmas. . . .

Aksel had received a letter, a big letter with a lion on it, from the government: he was to pick up telegraph wire, a telegraph apparatus, tools and implements at Brede Olsen’s and take over inspection of the line from New Year’s Day.

## IV

They are driving with many horses up through the moors, hauling the buildings of the new man in the backland, load after load, for days on end. They unload at a place to be called Storborg, which will one day be great, no doubt, as its name promises. Four men are already at work over in the mountains, quarrying stone for a foundation wall and two cellars.

Load after load. Every log has been notched beforehand, so they can be laid on as soon as spring comes; it has been neatly worked out. The logs have a serial number, and not a door, not a window, not a colored windowpane for the veranda is missing. And one day a driver brings a huge load of pickets. What's that? One of the settlers below Breidablik knows, he is from the south and has seen such things before. "That's the garden fence," he says. So the new man is going to lay out a garden in the wilds, a big garden.

It was all very promising—never before had there been such traffic up through the moors, and many horse owners earned a pretty penny doing haulage. They also discussed the prospect for future earnings: the storekeeper would be getting his merchandise from at home and abroad, and it would have to be carted up from the sea with many horses.

It looked like everything was to be on a grand scale here. A young foreman or manager in charge of the haulage had arrived, a squirt who didn't think he had enough horses, although there weren't many loads left to haul. "What's left of the buildings won't amount to very many loads," they told him. "And what about all the merchandise!" he replied. When Sivert Sellanrå came plodding homeward without a load as usual, the manager called to him: "You're coming empty from down below? Why didn't you bring a load here, to Storborg?"—"I could've done that, for sure, but I didn't know about it," Sivert replied. "He's from Sellanrå, they've got two horses!" someone whispered. "You've got two horses?" the manager asked. "Bring them both here and haul for us and you'll earn some money!"—"Well," Sivert replied, "that might not be such a bad idea. But right now it's a very busy time for us."—"You don't have time to earn money!" the manager said.

No, they didn't always have time to spare at Sellanrå, there was so much to do at home. Now, for the first time, they had even gotten hired men to help, two Swedish masons who were blasting stone for a cow barn.

This cow barn had been Isak's grand idea for many years, the turf hut was getting both too small and too poor for the animals; a stone barn with double walls and a regular manure pit was in the offing. But there were so many things in the offing, one thing always bringing another in its wake; in any case, there was never an end to building. He had a sawmill and a flour mill and a summer dairy, shouldn't he also have a forge? Only a small forge, to make do, a makeshift; it was a long way to the village if the sledgehammer developed a lip or a pair of horseshoes had to be sharpened. Just so he would get by, nothing more: a forge and an anvil—that wasn't asking too much, was it? Altogether, there will be a great many buildings at Sellanrå, large and small.

The farm is growing bigger and bigger, mighty. Thus, it is impossible to manage without a servant girl anymore, and Jensine has to stay on. Her father, the blacksmith, asks about her occasionally, if she won't be coming home soon, but he doesn't insist; he is very obliging and probably means something by it. So there, at the top of the common, sits Sellanrå, growing bigger and bigger, with more buildings and larger fields; but the people are the same. When the Lapps come by, they no longer try to lead the Sellanrå people by the nose, that came to an end long ago. And they don't come by very often, usually giving the farm a wide berth; in any case, they don't come into the house anymore but stop outside, if they stop at all. The Lapps keep to the fringes, lurking in the dark; expose them to light and air and they don't thrive, like vermin and maggots. Now and then a calf or a lamb abruptly disappears in an outlying field, far off on the fringes of Sellanrå. It cannot be helped. Obviously, Sellanrå can afford it. And even if Sivert could shoot, he doesn't have a gun; but he cannot shoot, being unwarlike and cheerful, a great joker. "Besides," he says, "the Lapps are probably protected by law."

Sellanrå can bear small losses of livestock because it is large and strong, but it is not without worries, oh no. Inger is not equally satisfied with herself and with life all the year round; she once made a long journey and it seems to have left her with a sort of wily unreasonableness. It may go away, but comes back. She is able and hard-working as in her best days, and she is a handsome, healthy wife for her husband, for the water troll; but doesn't she have memories of Trondhjem? Doesn't she ever dream? Oh yes, especially in winter. She can be devilishly spirited, full of the joy of life, but since she cannot dance alone, there are no balls. Brooding thoughts and the prayer book? Well, yes. But the other sort of life is also splendid and wonderful, as God knows. She has learned to be content with little: although the Swedish masons have brought strange faces and unfamiliar voices to the farm, they are quiet older men, and they don't play, they work. But they are better than nothing, a bright spot; one of them sings beautifully on the job, and Inger stops to listen now and then. His name is Hjalmar.

But that doesn't mean all is well at Sellanrå. There is, for one, the great disappointment with Eleseus. He had written to say that his job in the engineer's office had been abolished, but he was going to get another job if only he could wait. In another letter he wrote that, while waiting for a high office job, he couldn't live on nothing, and when he received a hundred-kroner bill from home, he wrote back that it was just enough to pay off a few debts. "I say!" Isak remarked. "But we've got masons here and many expenses, so ask Eleseus if he won't rather come home and help us." Inger wrote, but Eleseus didn't want to come home again; no, he wouldn't make this trip once again for nothing, he would rather starve.

So there couldn't have been any high office job available in the entire city, nor, perhaps, was Eleseus as sharp as a razor in clearing a path for himself. Maybe he wasn't a very capable person either, God knows. Kind he certainly was, and diligent with his pen, but did he show spirit and brilliance? And if not, what was to become of him?

When he arrived from home with his two hundred kroner, the city was waiting for him with its old bills. And when they had been paid he had to get himself a walking stick and not an umbrella shaft. There were also several other things that he obviously needed: a fur cap for the winter, which all his friends wore; a pair of skates to go racing on the town ice; and a silver toothpick for cleaning his teeth and making elegant gestures with when chatting with friends over a glass of wine. And as long as he was flush with money, he stood treats to the best of his ability; at the party celebrating his return to the city he uncorked half a dozen bottles of beer with the utmost economy. "What, you give twenty øre to the barmaid?" they asked him. "We give ten."—"One shouldn't be petty," Elseus said.

No, there was nothing petty about Elseus. They needn't worry about him, being from a big farm, well, from an estate; his father, the margrave, owned endless tracts of timberland, four horses, thirty cows and three mowing machines. Elseus was no liar: it wasn't he who had spread the fairy tale about the Sellanrå estate, that was the doing of the district engineer, puffing himself up in the city a while back. But Elseus didn't mind that the fairy tale was half believed to be true. Since he himself was nobody, he could be someone's son and get credit on that, thereby staying afloat. But it didn't work in the long run; one day he had to pay up, and then he was stuck. However, one of his friends managed to get him into his father's business, a country store with all sorts of merchandise—it was better than nothing. It was unsuitable for someone his age to start at a beginner's wage in a general store if he was to be trained as sheriff, but it was a livelihood, a provisional way out, and actually not so bad. Elseus was kind and well-behaved here, too, and was well liked by everybody; he wrote home that he had gone into trade.

This was his mother's great disappointment. When Elseus stood behind the counter in a country store, he was, after all, not a whit better than the clerk at the village store; previously he had been ever so much more: no one except him had left the parish and become an office clerk. Had he lost sight of his great goal? Inger wasn't stupid, she knew there existed a difference between the ordinary and the extraordinary, though she might not always distinguish them very exactly. Isak was simpler and more unsophisticated, he reckoned less and less with Elseus now when trying to figure things out; his elder son was slipping outside his domain. He ceased thinking of Sellanrå as being divided between his two sons when he himself was gone.

In late spring engineers and workers arrived from Sweden; they were going to build roads, construct barracks, level the ground and blast, as well as establish contacts with food suppliers, horse owners, and property owners on the coast. What, why all this? Aren't we in the backland where everything is dead? Well, they were about to start experimental operations in the copper mountain.

So it was becoming reality, after all, Geissler hadn't just been fooling around.

They were not the same big shots as the last time, no; the district governor was not among them, nor was the proprietor, but the mining expert and the engineer were the same. They bought from Isak all the sawn boards he could spare, bought food and drink and paid well, chatted and were friendly, and took a liking to Sellanrå. "Cableway!" they said. "An aerial cable from the top of the mountain to the sea!" they said. "Down through all these bogs here?" Isak asked, he thought so poorly. "No," and they had to laugh, "on the other side," they said, "not here on this side, that would be miles and miles down; no, on the other side of the mountain, all the way to the ocean, where the fall is steep and no distance. We run the ore down through the air in iron tanks, it'll be terrific, wait and see. But to begin with we haul the ore down, we build a road and haul it down with horses—oh, fifty horses, just as terrific. And we aren't only the crew you see here; what are we? Nothing! More men will come up from the other side, a procession of workers and ready-made barracks and provisions and materiel and tools of all sorts," they said, "and we meet at the top. Things will really start rolling, to the tune of millions, and the ore is going to South America."—"The district governor isn't with you?" Isak asked. "What district governor? Oh, him, no; he sold out."—"And the proprietor?"—"He, too, has sold. So you remember them? No, they've sold. And those who bought from them have sold in turn. Now the copper mountain is owned by a big company, enormously wealthy people."—"And Geissler, where is he?" Isak asked. "Geissler? Don't know him."—"Sheriff Geissler, the man who sold you the mountain?"—"Oh him! Geissler was his name? God knows where he is! So you remember him too?"

They blasted and worked in the mountain with many men throughout the summer, and there was a bustling activity everywhere; Inger carried on extensive trade in milk, butter and cheese, and it was fun to buy and sell and to see so many people coming and going. Isak tramped along in his booming way and tilled the soil undisturbed; the two masons and Sivert were putting up the cow barn. It was a large structure, but getting it up was slow; there wasn't enough manpower for the stonework and, besides, Sivert was often away to help in the field. As things were, the mowing machine was a good thing to have, along with three women who were fast with their rakes in the haying field.

Everything was fine, the wilderness had come alive and was awash in money.

Take the trading center Storborg, for instance, wasn't it doing business on a grand scale? That Aaron fellow must be a hell of a guy, a real daredevil; he had learned about the imminent mining operation and instantly turned up with his store and traded—oh, he traded like a minister of state, or rather like royalty. First of all, he sold all kinds of household goods and working clothes; but miners with money in their pockets are not penny pinchers who buy only necessities, no, they buy everything. On Saturday nights in particular the Storborg trading center was swarming with people and Aaron was raking in money; both his assistant and his wife were helping out behind the counter, and he himself did all he could, and even so the place wasn't empty and deserted until late in the night. The horse owners in the parish were proven correct: there began an enormous hauling of merchandise up to Storborg, and the road had to be relaid and repaired in several places. It was now nothing like Isak's first narrow path up through the common. Aaron became a real benefactor of the area, with his trade and his new road. By the way, his name was not Aaron, that was only his baptismal name; his name was Aaronsen. That was what he called himself and that was what his wife called him; the family was snooty and had two maidservants and a hired man.

For the present, the land at Storborg had to lie untouched, there was no time for farming. Who cared to go poking around in the bogs! But Aaronsen had a garden enclosed by a picket fence, with red currants and aster, rowans and other planted trees, a fine garden. It had a broad path where Aaronsen could walk on Sundays, smoking his long pipe; in the background was the veranda of the house, with panes of colored glass, red, yellow and blue. Storborg. Three good-looking small children were running around the place; the girl would learn how to be the daughter of a trader, the boys were to learn trade themselves—ho, three children with a future!

If Aaronsen hadn't thought of the future, he wouldn't have come here at all. He would have continued fishing and perhaps been lucky and made good money that way too; but it wasn't like business, it wasn't genteel, it was not respectable—the hats didn't fly off before it. Aaronsen had rowed, he had plied the oars, in the future he wanted to sail. He had a saying: absolutely safe. His children would enjoy a more absolutely safe life than he himself had done, he said; by that he meant that he would give them a life with less toil.

And, indeed, the prospects looked good, people paid respect to him and his wife, even to the children. That they took note of the children wasn't the least part of it. When the miners came down from the mountain, they hadn't seen small fry in a long while; coming across Aaronsen's brood in the yard, they immediately talked with them in a friendly way, as if they had bumped into three poodles. They would have gotten out their pennies, but since the children belonged to the trader himself, they played the harmonica for them instead. Then came Gustaf, that wild young fellow, his hat cocked over one ear and his tongue ever ready with merry words—yes, he came up and amused them for quite a while. The children recognized him every time and ran to meet him; he would take all three on his back and dance with them. "Ho!" Gustaf said and danced. Then he would take out his harmonica and play dances and ballads; the two maidservants would come out and watch Gustaf, listening to his playing with tears in their eyes. Gustaf knew what he was doing, madcap that he was!

After a while he would go into the store and throw his money around, filling his rucksack with all sorts of things, and when he went back to the mountain again, he was carrying a whole little store of his own, which he would open at Sellanrå and show off. There was stationery with flowers on it, a new pipe and a new shirt, and a fringed neckerchief; there were goodies, which he distributed among the womenfolk, and there were shiny things, a watch chain with compass and a penknife. Oh, there were lots of things, like rockets he had bought for Sunday to amuse himself and others with. Inger gave him milk to drink, and he joked with Leopoldine and swung little Rebecca high in the air. Well, would the cow barn be finished soon? he asked his countrymen, the masons, making friends with them as well. They didn't have enough help, the masons replied. They could have him, Gustaf said in jest. "If only that were true!" Inger said; for the cow barn was supposed to be finished by fall, when the animals were brought inside.

Then Gustaf fired off a rocket, followed by one more—oh, why not set off all six of them! The women and children held their breaths in amazement at the magic and the magician. Inger had never seen a rocket before, but these wild flashes reminded her of the great world out there. What was a sewing machine now! And when Gustaf ended by playing the harmonica, Inger was ready to see him on his way for sheer excitement. . . .

The mining takes its course, the ore being hauled down to the coast by teams of horses; a steamship has taken in cargo and sailed off to South America, and another ship has arrived. A great hustle and bustle. Every settler who can walk has been to the mountain and seen the wonders, and Brede Olsen went there with his stone samples but was turned away because the mining expert had gone back to Sweden. On Sundays flocks of people have been going up there, all the way from the village; even Aksel Strøm, who has no time to spare, went by way of the mines the couple of times he did line inspection. There is now hardly anybody who has not seen the wonders. And if it isn't Inger Sellanrå herself—she has put on nice clothes and her gold ring and makes for the mountain.

What does she want there?

She doesn't want anything, she isn't even curious to find out how they are opening up the mountain; she just wants to show herself. When Inger saw other women set out for the mountain, she felt she must go too. She has a disfiguring scar on her upper lip and she has grown-up children, but she felt she must go. She is annoyed that the others are young, but she will try to keep up with them; she hasn't begun to grow stout as yet, she is tall and handsome and can still look good. Obviously she is no longer white and rosy, and her golden peach-like complexion has worn off long ago, but she would show them—they would nod and say, "She will do!"

They receive her with the utmost friendliness, the workers have had many a bowl of milk from Inger and they know her; they show her around in the mines, from the barracks and the stables to the kitchen, basement and pantry. The bolder ones edge close to her and take her lightly by the arm, but Inger doesn't mind, it does her good. When she has to walk up or down the stone steps, she lifts her skirt high up and exposes her legs, but she doesn't make a number of it and acts as though it were nothing. She will do, the workers must think.

The old thing, she is really touching: you could see that a glance from one or another of these hot-blooded men took her by surprise; she was grateful for it and returned it—oh, she was tickled at being popular, she was a woman like other women. She must have been chaste for lack of temptation.

The old thing.

Gustaf came. He handed over two girls from the village to a comrade so he could come. Gustaf knew what he was doing: he gave Inger a needlessly warm and hearty handshake and thanked her for her recent hospitality, but he wasn't aggressive. "Listen, Gustaf, when will you come and help us with the cow barn?" Inger says, turning scarlet. Gustaf replies that, sure, he'll be coming, and quite soon. His comrades, hearing this, say they'll all be coming down pretty soon. "Oh," Inger asks, "you won't be up here in the mountain this winter, then?" The men answer guardedly that, no, it didn't look like it. Gustaf is bolder, telling her with a laugh that they had

probably scraped out nearly all the copper there was. "You don't say!" Inger exclaims. "Hm," the other men put in, Gustaf had better be careful what he was saying!

But Gustaf was not careful, he said still more, laughing, and as far as Inger was concerned, he was winning her for himself, strangely enough, though he was not aggressive. Another fellow played the accordion, but it didn't compare to Gustaf playing the harmonica; a third, another clever fellow, tried to attract attention by singing a memorized ballad to the accordion, but that wasn't anything either, although he had a ringing voice. A moment later, there was Gustaf with Inger's gold ring on his little finger, no less. And how had that happened, since he was by no means aggressive? Oh, he was aggressive enough, but he went about it in a quiet way, as did she; they didn't talk about it, and she didn't turn a hair when he fiddled with her hand. When she was sitting in the barracks kitchen drinking coffee later on, she heard some noisy quarreling from outside, and she realized that it was, so to speak, in her honor. It tickled her—what a sweet roar to the ears of the old heath hen!

And in what shape did she come home from the mountain that Sunday evening? Ho, in excellent shape, just as virtuous as when she went there, no more and no less. Coming down, she was accompanied by many men, who refused to turn around as long as Gustaf was there; they wouldn't give in, had no intention of giving in! Inger had never had so much fun, not even in the days when she was out in the wide world. But hadn't Inger lost something? they asked at last. "Lost? No."—"The gold ring!" they said. And so Gustaf had to come out with it, having a whole army against him. "It was good you found it," Inger said, making haste to say goodbye to the company.

When she approached Sellanrå, she saw the many roofs of the buildings—down there was her home. Waking up to herself as the capable wife she really was, she decided to take a shortcut to the summer dairy to see to the animals. On the way there she comes to a place she knows well: here a little child was once buried, she had patted down the earth with her hands and put up a small cross. Oh, it was so long ago. But come to think, have the girls done the milking and finished their chores?

The mining takes its course, to be sure, but it is rumored that the mountain won't keep its promises. The mining expert who had gone home returns, bringing along another expert; they drill and blast and investigate thoroughly. What's the matter? The copper is good enough, that is not the problem, but the vein is thin and without depth; it increases in thickness southward, beginning to be deep and rich just where the company border runs, but there is the common again. Evidently, the original buyers hadn't taken their purchase very seriously; they were a family council, some kinsfolk who bought on spec. They didn't secure the whole range for themselves, that six-mile stretch over to the next valley; no, they just bought a patch of ground from Isak Sellanrå and Geissler and sold it again.

And what was to be done now? The bosses, foremen and mining experts clearly understand the situation: they must go on and make a deal with the state without delay. They send an express courier to Sweden with documents and maps, and then ride north to the sheriff in order to lay claim to the entire mountain south of the lake. But now there begin to be difficulties: the law stands in their way, they are foreigners and cannot buy directly. They knew that and have taken care of it. But the south side of the mountain has already been sold, and that they did not know. "Sold?" the gentlemen say. "A long time ago, several years ago."—"Who bought it?"—"Geissler."—"Which Geissler? Oh, him!"—"Title deed registered," the sheriff says. "It was a bald mountain, he got it for next to nothing."—"Who the hell is this Geissler we hear about now and then? Where is he?"—"God knows where he is!"

The gentlemen had to send another courier to Sweden. And they would, of course, learn who Geissler was. For the time being they couldn't work with a full crew anymore.

And so Gustaf came down to Sellanrå, carrying all his worldly goods on his back. Here he came! he said. Well, Gustaf had left the company; that is, talking about the copper mountain last Sunday, he had been a bit too loose-mouthed, his words were relayed to the foreman and the engineer and Gustaf had lost his job. Good riddance! Anyway, it may have been just what he wanted: now he aroused no suspicion by coming to Sellanrå. He was hired at once to help with the cow barn.

They laid stone upon stone, and when soon after another man came down from the mountain, he too got a job doing masonry. Now they were two working parties and the work went very smoothly. There would be a new cow barn by fall, all right.

But now one after another of the miners came down from the mountain; they had been fired and were going back to Sweden. The experimental operation was to stop. The people in the area below the mountain seemed to heave a sigh; they had been stupid enough not to understand that an experimental operation was an operation on trial, which it was. They fell prey to depression and misgivings; money was more scarce, wages were cut, the trading center Storborg fell silent. What did it all portend? The whole thing had started so well; Aaronsen had gotten a flagstaff and a flag, equipped his sledge with a polar bear pelt for the winter and fitted out his family with fine clothes. These were only trifles, of course, but bigger things had also occurred: thus, two new men had bought land for clearing in the wilds, way up, between Måneland and Sellanrå; that was by no means without importance for this out-of-the-way little world. The two settlers had put up their turf huts, cleared land and drained bogs; they were hard-working folk and had accomplished a lot in a short time. Throughout the summer they had bought their provisions at Storborg, but the last time they came down there was hardly anything to be had. Merchandise—what use was merchandise to Aaronsen when the mining had stopped? Now he had next to no merchandise, only money. Of all the people in the backland, Aaronsen was perhaps the most depressed, his calculation had been so wrong. When someone advised him to work his land and live on that till better times, Aaronsen replied, "To poke in the ground? That's not what I and my family came here for."

At last Aaronsen couldn't stand it any longer, he would go up to the mines and look into the matter for himself. It was a Sunday. When he reached Sellanrå he wanted Isak to come with him, but Isak had never set foot on the mountain since the operation began;

he liked it best on the hillside down below. Inger had to come to the rescue: "Why don't you go with Aaronsen when he asks you to!" she said. Evidently, Inger didn't mind if Isak wasn't there for a while; it was Sunday, she may have wished to be rid of him for a few hours. And Isak went along.

They saw many interesting things up in the mountain. Isak didn't recognize the place—a town of barracks, carriages and gaping mines. The engineer himself showed them around. He probably wasn't very cheerful at the moment, the good engineer, but he had tried to fight the oppressive mood that weighed on the settlers and the villagers. And here was a really good opportunity: the margrave of Sellanrå in person and the merchant from Storborg were visiting.

He explained the type of rock: pyrite ore, copper pyrite, contained copper, iron and sulfur. They knew precisely what the rocks contained, there was even some silver and gold. If you were in the mining business you had to know your stuff. "But is it going to stop now?" Aaronsen asks. "Stop?" the engineer repeats, astonished. That certainly wouldn't do for South America. They would stop the experimental operation for a short while, to be sure, having seen what the site offered; then they would build a cableway and tackle the mountain to the south. Isak didn't know where this fellow Geissler was keeping himself, did he? "No." Well, he would be found, for sure. Then it would start in earnest. "Stop, no!"

Isak is surprised and excited by a little machine that can be worked by a treadle; he sees at once what it is, a small forge you can put on a cart and move about and set down anywhere you want. "What does a machine like that cost?" Isak asks. "That? The field forge? It doesn't cost much." They had several of them; but they had quite different machines and contraptions down by the sea, huge machines. Isak must surely understand you couldn't make such deep valleys and chasms in the mountain with your fingernails, ha-ha-ha.

As they stroll about, the engineer tells them he is going to Sweden one of these days. "But you'll be back, won't you?" Aaronsen asks. "Naturally." He wasn't aware of anything the government or the police over there could arrest him for. As if by chance, through Isak's maneuvering, they stand again in front of the little forge. "How much can such a forge cost?" he asks. "Cost?" That the engineer can't remember. It did cost some money, of course, but in relation to a big mining budget that was nothing. The engineer was a splendid fellow; he may have been anything but cheerful just then, but he kept up appearances and was grand and jaunty till the last. Did Isak need a field forge? "Take that one!" His company was powerful, it made him a present of the field forge.

About an hour later, Aaronsen and Isak are on their way home again. Aaronsen has calmed down, instilled with fresh hopes; Isak lumbers down the mountainside with the precious forge on his back. The old barge was used to carrying cargo! The engineer had offered to have a couple of men bring the treasure to Sellanrå the following morning, but Isak thanked him and said they shouldn't take the trouble. He was thinking of the folks at home, that it would be a nice surprise for them to see him come walking down with a forge on his back.

Isak was the one to be surprised.

At that very moment a horse, pulling a cart with a most unusual load, turned into the yard. The driver was a man from the village, but beside him walked a gentleman whom Isak stared at in wonder: it was Geissler.



## V

Isak might have reason to be surprised by a few other things as well, but he was no wizard at thinking of several things at once. "Where's Inger?" was all he said as he passed by the kitchen door. He was thinking of Geissler, that he must be properly received.

Inger? Inger was berry-picking, had been doing so since Isak went to the mountain, she and Gustaf, the Swede. The old thing had gone crazy and fallen in love; fall and winter were coming on, but she felt hot inside again, flowers blooming inside her again. "Come and show me where the cloudberry are," Gustaf said. How could a woman say no! She ran into the bedroom and was both serious and religious for several minutes, but there he was waiting outside; the world was at her heels, and so she fixed her hair, looked at herself carefully in the mirror and went out again. So what, who wouldn't have done the same? Women cannot tell one man from another, not always, not often.

They go berrying in the cloudberry bogs, stepping from tussock to tussock; she lifts her skirt and shows her fine legs. It is still everywhere; the young of the ptarmigan are already grown, so it doesn't hiss anymore, and there are sheltered spots among the bushes in the bogs. Less than an hour has passed and already they are taking a rest. "You're mad!" Inger says. Oh, he makes her feel so weak, she's head over heels in love; she smiles helplessly—oh, how sweet, and at the same time painful, it is to be in love! Convention bids you put up a fight, right? Yes, only to surrender in the end. Inger is lovestruck, fatally and mercilessly. She wishes him well and is only deep and delicious to him.

The old thing.

"When the cow barn is finished, you'll leave," she says. No, he wasn't leaving. Well, he would have to leave sometime, of course, but not for a week or so. "Shouldn't we go back?" she asks. "No."

They pick berries, and in a while they again find a sheltered place among the bushes. "You're crazy, Gustaf!" Inger says. Hours go by, it looks like they're sleeping in the bushes. Sleeping? It's marvelous—in the middle of the wilderness, in Eden. Then Inger says, sitting straight up and listening, "I think I hear someone driving over on the road, far off." The sun is setting, the heathery knolls are darkened by shadow as they walk homeward. They pass many cozy spots; Gustaf sees them and Inger sees them too, no doubt, but she feels all the time that someone is driving ahead of them. Oh, but who could walk all the way home with a wild handsome boy and constantly put up a fight? Inger is so weak, she only smiles and says, "You're someone, real mad!"

She comes home by herself. It was good that she came now, excellent, one minute later would not have been good at all. Isak has just entered the yard with his forge and with Aaronsen; a horse and cart have just stopped.

"Good evening," Geissler says, greeting Inger too.

There they stand looking at one another. Nothing could be more proper. . . .

Geissler has come back. He has been away for several years, but here he is again, aged and turned gray, but quick as always; and now he is elegant, in a white vest and with a gold chain. Who the hell can understand such a man!

Had he perhaps learned that something was going on in the copper mountain and would like to examine the matter? Good, here he was. He looks extremely alert; he surveys the place and the fields by slowly turning his head and using his eyes. He sees great changes, the margrave has enlarged his dominion. Geissler nods.

"What are you carrying?" he asks Isak. "A load for a horse!" he says. "A forge," Isak explains. "It'll be a handy thing to have many a time here on my little place," he says, referring to Sellanrå as a little place. "Where did you get it?"—"Up at the mountain, the engineer made me a present of it."—"Is there an engineer up there?" Geissler asks, as if he didn't know.

And was Geissler to be outdone by an engineer up in the mountain! "I've heard you've got a mowing machine, and now I've brought you a hay-rake," he says, pointing to the load on the cart. There it was, red and blue, an immense comb, a rake to be drawn by a horse. They lifted it off the cart and looked it over; Isak hitched himself to it and tried it over in the field. No wonder he was agape, one marvel after another was coming to Sellanrå.

They talked about the copper mountain, about the mine. "They were asking about you," Isak said. "Who?"—"The engineer and all the gentlemen. They simply had to get hold of you, they said." Oh, there Isak probably made too much of it, Geissler might be displeased; his neck stiffened as he said, "I'm here if they want me."

The next day the two couriers came back from Sweden, accompanied by a couple of the mine owners; they were stout, dignified gentlemen on horseback, wealthy to judge by their appearance. They barely stopped at Sellanrå, but asked from the saddle a few questions about the way and rode on up the mountain. They acted as if they didn't see Geissler, though he was standing nearby. The couriers with their loaded pack horses rested for an hour, talked to the masons at the cow barn, learned that the old gentleman in the white vest and with the gold chain was Geissler and then continued on as well. But that same evening one of the couriers came down to the farm requesting Geissler by word of mouth to join the gentlemen in the mountain. "I'm here if they want me" was Geissler's answer.

He had become so great, maybe he thought he possessed all the power in the world and found a verbal message a bit too nonchalant? But how did he happen to come to Sellanrå exactly when he was needed? He must have a knack for omniscience,

knowing about all manner of things. Well, when the gentlemen up at the mountain received Geissler's reply, they simply had to go out of their way and show up at Sellanrå. They were accompanied by the engineer and the two mining experts.

So there were many bends and turns even before the meeting took place. Things were not promising, Geissler acted very high and mighty.

The gentlemen were courteous now, they apologized for having sent for him yesterday, they were so tired after their journey. Geissler returned their courtesy and replied that he, too, was tired after his journey, otherwise he would have come. All right, but now to the matter in hand: Would he sell the mountain south of the lake? "Are you buyers?" Geissler asked, "or am I speaking to go-betweens?" This could be nothing but perverseness on Geissler's part, he could surely tell by their looks that these elegant, stout gentlemen were no go-betweens. They went on: "The price?" they said. "Well, the price!" Geissler said too, thinking it over. "A couple of millions," he said. "Indeed!" the gentlemen said and smiled. Geissler did not smile.

The engineer and the mining experts had casually examined the mountain range, had drilled a few holes and done some blasting, and here were the data: the deposits were due to eruption; they were uneven, deepest around the borderline between the company's and Geissler's property according to the preliminary investigation, and diminishing afterward. For the last three miles there was no profitable pyrite ore to be found.

Geissler listened to this account with the utmost indifference. He took some documents from his pocket and studied them attentively; but they were not maps, and God knows if they concerned the copper mountain at all. "You didn't drill deep enough," he said, as though he could tell by the papers. The gentlemen immediately admitted that, but the engineer asked, "How can you, Geissler, know that? After all, you haven't done any drilling yourself, have you?" Then Geissler smiled, as if he had drilled several hundred meters down through the globe and hidden the holes afterward.

They kept at it till noon, talking back and forth, then they began to look at their watches. They had brought Geissler down to a quarter million, but not a hairsbreadth lower. They must have offended him quite seriously, assuming he was only too glad to sell, forced to sell, which he was not. Ho, couldn't they see that he sat there almost as genteel and grand as they! "Fifteen or twenty thousand would also be a nice bit of cash," the gentlemen said. Geissler didn't deny it, if one was in immediate need of the cash, but two hundred and fifty thousand was more. Then one of the gentlemen said, probably to make Geissler come down to earth, "By the way, your wife's people in Sweden send greetings."—"Thanks!" Geissler replied. When nothing helped, the other gentleman said, "But a quarter million! It's not gold, after all, it's copper ore." Geissler nodded. "It's copper ore."

Then the gentlemen became impatient and five watchcases sprang open and snapped to again; there was no more time for pleasantries. It was time for dinner. The gentlemen didn't ask for food at Sellanrå, but rode back to the mines to eat their own.

That was the end of the meeting.

Geissler was left alone.

What sort of speculations were occupying him, one wonders. Maybe none, maybe he was indifferent and unthinking? Not at all; he was thinking, all right, but showed no anxiety. After dinner he said to Isak, "I should take a long walk over to that mountain of mine, and it would be nice if Sivert came with me, like the last time."—"Certainly," Isak said at once. "No, he has other things to do."—"He shall go with you this minute!" Isak said and called Sivert down from the wall. Geissler held up his hand and said a curt no.

He wandered about the farm, coming back to the masons several times and talking amiably with them. How come he was up to it, seeing that he had just now been taken up with a big transaction! Maybe Geissler had lived so long in an unsettled state that nothing really seemed to be at stake for him anymore; in any case, no dizzying fall was in store for him.

He was where he was by sheer chance. Having sold the little mining parcel to his wife's relatives, he immediately bought the whole mountain range beyond it. Why did he do it? Did he mean to annoy the owners by becoming their nearest neighbor? Originally he had probably only thought of appropriating a strip south of the lake, where the mining town had to be situated if operation ever became a reality; however, because it cost next to nothing and because he didn't want to be bothered with a complicated borderline case, he became the owner of the whole mountain. He became a mining king from indifference; a site for a small town of barracks and machines became a kingdom running all the way to the sea.

In Sweden that small first mining parcel went from hand to hand, and Geissler kept well informed about its destiny. Obviously, those first owners had made a bad, a shockingly bad, bargain; not being miners, the family council had not secured enough of the mountain, wanting merely to pay out a certain Geissler to avoid having him close. But the new owners were no less ludicrous; powerful men, no doubt, they could allow themselves a joke and make a purchase for fun, close a deal in the middle of a wild party, God only knows. But once experimental operation began and the thing became serious, they suddenly stood before a wall: Geissler.

They're just kids! Geissler must have thought from his great height; he had become so courageous and stiff-necked. True, the gentlemen had done their best to cool him off; believing they were dealing with a needy person, they hinted at something like fifteen or twenty thousand—they were kids, they didn't know Geissler. There he stood.

The gentlemen didn't come down from the mountain anymore that day, thinking no doubt it was wise not to show themselves too eager. The next morning they came, with their pack horses in tow; they were going home. But by then Geissler had left.

Had Geissler left?

The gentlemen couldn't decide anything in the saddle, they had to dismount and wait. Where had Geissler gone? Nobody knew, he went everywhere, showing his interest in the Sellanrå farm; he was last seen at the sawmill. The couriers were sent out to hunt for him, but Geissler may have gone quite far, for he didn't reply when they called. Rather irritated at first, the gentlemen looked at their watches and said, "We won't make fools of ourselves by waiting for him. If Geissler wants to sell, he'd better be present!" But their great irritation subsided and they waited; they even began to feel amused, faced with the bleak prospect of spending the night out on the border mountain. "It's going brilliantly," they said, "one day our families will find our bones!"

At long last Geissler came. He had been looking around and was now returning from the summer dairy. "It looks like the summer dairy, too, will be too small for you," he told Isak. "How many head of cattle do you have all in all up there?" That's how he would talk, with the gentlemen standing there watch in hand. Geissler had a strange redness in his face, as if he had been drinking. "Phew, I got warm from the walk!" he said.

"We half expected you would be at hand," said one of the men. "You didn't ask me to," Geissler replied, "otherwise I would've been on the spot."—"Well, what about the deal?" Would Geissler today accept a reasonable offer? It wasn't an everyday thing for him either, was it, to have fifteen or twenty thousand kroner coming his way, or what? This fresh insinuation offended Geissler deeply. Was that a way to talk? The men would hardly have spoken like that if they hadn't been annoyed, and Geissler would hardly have instantly turned pale if he hadn't previously been to a lonely place and turned red. He blanched and replied coldly, "I do not want to suggest what you, gentlemen, may be in a position to pay, but I know what I'm willing to accept. I refuse to listen to any more child's prattle about the mountain. My price is the same as yesterday."—"A quarter of a million kroner?"—"Yes."

The men got on their horses.

"Mr. Geissler, listen to me," one of them said. "We'll go to twenty-five thousand."—"You're still being facetious," Geissler replied. "On the other hand, I'll propose something to you in all seriousness: Will you sell that little mining field of yours?"—"Yes," the men said, somewhat taken aback, "that might be possible."—"Then I'll buy it," Geissler said.

Oh, that Geissler! The yard was now full of people listening, all the Sellanrå folk, the masons, the gentlemen and the couriers. He might not be able to come up with the least bit of the money required for such a deal, though God knows if he couldn't. Who the hell could figure him out! In any case, he caused a small upset among the gentlemen by his words. Was it a trick? Did he think he could make his mountain more important by this maneuver?

The men thought it over; they actually began to discuss it among themselves in muffled tones and got down from their horses again. Then the engineer stuck his nose into it; he felt, no doubt, that this was getting too pathetic, and he seemed to have some power, maybe even authority. The whole yard was now full of people who were listening. "We're not selling!" he said. "No?" the gentlemen asked. "No."

They whispered for another moment, then got on their horses in earnest. "Twenty-five thousand!" one of the men cried. Geissler didn't reply; he turned and again went over to the masons.

And that was the end of their last meeting.

Geissler seemed indifferent to the consequences, walking to and fro and talking about one thing and another. At the moment he was taken up with the stonemasons, who were laying some huge joists across the whole cow barn. They would finish the cow barn this week; the roof would only be a temporary one, a new hayloft was to be built on top of the cow barn later on.

Isak kept Sivert away from the masonry, so that Geissler would find the boy free to make that mountain excursion at any moment. A useless concern—Geissler had given up the excursion or perhaps forgotten all about it. However, having got a small food pack from Inger to take along, he set off down the road and stayed away till evening.

He passed the two new clearings which had been started below Sellanrå and talked to the men; he went all the way down to Måneland, wanting to find out what Aksel Strøm had accomplished during the last few years. He hadn't made rapid strides forward, but he had done good work on the land. Geissler took an interest in this new farm too, and asked him, "Do you have a horse?"—"Yes."—"I have a mowing machine and a disc harrow down south, both new, I'll send them to you."—"What?" Aksel asks, unable to understand such largess; he imagined something like payment by installments. "I'll make you a present of the equipment," Geissler said. "That can't be possible?"—"But you must help your two neighbors up above and harrow some cleared land for them."—"That's the least I can do," Aksel declared, still unable to figure out Geissler. "You have property and machines down south, then?"—"I have many irons in the fire." Well, perhaps Geissler did not—have many irons in the fire, that is—though he often let on he did. After all, he could simply buy the mowing machine and the harrow in any town and send them north.

He talked for a long time with Aksel Strøm, about the other settlers, about Storborg, the trading center, and about Aksel's brother, a newly married man who had come to Breidablik and begun to open up the bogs and get the water out of them. Aksel complained that he couldn't find a woman helper, he only had an old thing called Oline; she didn't manage to do much, but he must think himself lucky as long as he could keep her. For a while this summer, Aksel had had to work night and day. He could perhaps have gotten a woman from his home parish in Helgeland, but then he would've had to pay passage money in addition to wages. There were expenses at every turn. Aksel related further that he had taken on the inspection of the telegraph line, but regretted having done so. "That sort of thing is for men like Brede," Geissler said. "That's for sure!" Aksel admitted. "But then there was the money."—"How many cows do you have?"—"Four. And a year-old bullock." It was so far to go to Sellanrå to have a cow covered.

But there was a far more important matter that Aksel wanted badly to talk with Geissler about: an investigation had been instituted against Barbro. Of course, it had come to light: Barbro had been with child when she was there, but she had left free as the breeze and without a child. What was the truth of the matter? When Geissler heard what it was about, he said simply, "Come along!" He took Aksel with him, away from the buildings, with the air of a person of authority. They sat down at the edge of the wood and Geissler said, "Let me hear."

Of course, it had come to light, how could it be avoided! The area was no longer devoid of people, and besides, Oline was there. What did Oline have to do with it? Ho! On top of everything, Brede Olsen had fallen out with her. Oline could no longer be overlooked, she was living at the scene of the crime and could pump Aksel himself little by little. She did, after all, live for, and in part live on, such shady business, and here was again something with the right smell! Oline had really grown too old and feeble now to keep house and tend cattle at Måneland, she ought to give it up; but could she? Could she quietly leave a place where such a big mystery was unsolved? She managed the winter work, she even toiled her way through last summer; the very prospect of being able to unmask a daughter of Brede gave her an enormous strength. No sooner had the snow melted in the fields this spring than Oline began to sniff around; she found the little green mound by the creek and saw right away that the sod had been laid down in squares. She had even been lucky enough to catch Aksel one day as he was flattening out the little grave with his feet. So Aksel knew about the whole business. Oline nodded her gray head: now it was her turn!

Not that Aksel was a bad man to work for, but he was very close-fisted, counted his cheeses and kept track of every handful of wool; Oline did not have a free hand, far from it. And as for his rescue last year—had Aksel shown himself to be a gentleman and given her full credit for it? On the contrary, he was still insisting on splitting the triumph. Sure enough, he would say, if Oline hadn't come he would've had to spend the night freezing out there, but Brede had also been a great help on the way home. That was the thanks she got. It was enough, Oline thought, to make the Almighty vent his wrath upon the whole human race! Why couldn't Aksel have taken a cow in her stall, led her forth and said, "This is your cow, Oline!" But no.

The question now was whether it wouldn't cost him more than a cow!

Throughout the summer Oline waylaid all who passed by, talked in whispers with them and nodded and confided in them. "But this is between us," she said. Oline was also in the village a few times. And now rumors began to spread in the backland, drifting like fog that settled on people's faces and forced its way into their ears; even the children going to school at Breidablik began to nod with secrets. Finally the sheriff had to bestir himself, report it and receive his orders. Then one day he came to Måneland, with an attendant and a register, to investigate; he made some notes and left again. But three weeks later he came back to investigate and made some more notes, and this time he opened a small green mound by the creek and took out the body of a child. Oline's help was indispensable; in return, he had to answer her many questions, replying, among other things, that, yes, it might come to putting Aksel under arrest. Then Oline clapped her hands at all the wickedness she'd gotten mixed up with in this place and wished she were far, far away. "But what about Barbro?" she whispered. "The girl, Barbro," the sheriff said, "is in custody in Bergen; justice must take its course," he said. Then he picked up the body and left.

Little wonder, then, that Aksel Strøm was anxious. He had explained himself to the sheriff and denied nothing: what he had a share in was the child; beyond that, he had on his own dug a grave for it. Now he was asking Geissler what he should do next. Very likely, he would have to go to town for a far worse interrogation and torture, eh?

Geissler was no longer so hearty, the lengthy account had tired him; for whatever reason, he slackened, as if his morning inspiration was no longer upon him. He looked at his watch, got up and said, "This has to be carefully considered, I'll think about it. You'll have my answer before I leave."

With that Geissler went off.

In the evening he returned to Sellanrå, had a bite to eat and went to bed. He slept till late in the day, slept and had a good rest; he must have felt weak after his meeting with the Swedish mine owners. Only two days later did he prepare to leave. He was once again grand and superior, paid generously and gave little Rebecca a shiny krone.

In a regular speech to Isak, he said, "It doesn't matter if nothing came of the deal this time, some day it'll come off, you bet; for the present I'm stopping this operation in the mountains. They were nothing but a bunch of children, thinking they could teach me a lesson. Did you hear what they offered me—twenty-five thousand?"—"Yes," Isak said. "Well," Geissler continued, tossing his head at all sorts of ridiculous offers and specks of dust, "it won't hurt the district up here if I stop the operation; on the contrary, it will force people to till the soil. But they will feel it in the village. They took in a good deal of money this summer, there were fine clothes and pollard porridge for one and all; now it's over. You know, the village could just as well have been friends with me, then it might have turned out differently. Now I'm top dog!"

However, he didn't look very much like top dog when he left, carrying a small food pack in his hand and wearing a vest that was no longer pure-white. Perhaps his good wife had used up the remainder of the forty thousand she had once received when she equipped him for this trip, God knows if that wasn't the case. And now he'll come home broke!

He didn't forget to drop in on Aksel Strøm on his way down to give him his answer. "I've given it some thought," he said. "Since the case is in progress, there's nothing you can do right now. You'll be summoned to a hearing, where you will have to explain yourself. . . ." Nothing but ordinary chatter—perhaps Geissler hadn't given the least thought to the matter. And Aksel, dispirited, said yes to everything. In the end Geissler livened up and became a powerful man once more; he knitted his brows and said, as if pondering, "Unless I could somehow arrange to show up in town and be present."—"If only you could!" Aksel exclaimed. The next moment Geissler had made his decision. "I'll see if I can find the time, I have so much to look after down south. But I'll see if I can find the time. Goodbye for now. I'll send you that equipment." Geissler left. Was it to be his last trip upcountry?

## VI

The rest of the workers come down from the mountain, the operation has been stopped. The mountain sits there, dead, once again.

The stone cow barn at Sellanrå is finished; a temporary sod roof has been put in place for the winter. The big building is divided into rooms, bright rooms, a huge lounge in the middle and large cabinets at either end, as if it were for human beings. Isak once lived in a turf hut on the place, together with some goats; now there is no turf hut anymore at Sellanrå.

They build pens and stalls, for horses and cattle. To finish quickly, the two masons are still kept on, but Gustaf is no good at woodwork, he says, and will be leaving. Gustaf has been a fabulous help with the stonework, doing lifts like a bear; in the evening he has delighted and amused everybody by playing his harmonica, and he has also helped the women carry heavy washtubs to and from the river. But now he will be leaving. No, he is no good at woodwork, he says. It looks as though he absolutely wants to get away.

"You could stay until tomorrow, couldn't you?" Inger says. No, there is no more work here, and besides, going now, he can have the company of the last miners over the border mountain. "Who will help me with the washtubs now?" she says, smiling sadly. The jolly Gustaf can fix that right away: he mentions Hjalmar. Hjalmar was the younger of the two masons, but neither of them was young like Gustaf, nobody was like him. "Hjalmar, no!" Inger replies contemptuously. But suddenly she checks herself and tries to egg Gustaf on. "Well, actually Hjalmar isn't bad at all," she says. "And he sings so nicely when he works."—"A real crackerjack!" declares Gustaf, quite calmly. But he could certainly stay one more night? No, then his company would leave before him.

By now Gustaf was no doubt getting tired of it all. It was a coup to have snatched her up under the eyes of all his comrades and to have her for the few weeks he had been in the place; but now he was going away to other jobs, perhaps to a sweetheart at home, new prospects both. Could he go on hanging about here for Inger's sake? He had a good enough reason for breaking it off, one she couldn't fail to understand; but she had become so bold, so irresponsible, not caring about anything. What they had between them hadn't lasted for very long, but it had lasted till the masonry was done.

Inger is indeed sad, she is so waywardly faithful that she grieves. It is not easy for her, her love is sincere and without affectation. No, she is not ashamed of it; she is a strong woman full of weakness, in tune with the nature that surrounds her: it is the glow of autumn. Her breast heaves with emotion as she prepares a food pack for Gustaf to take along. She doesn't ask herself whether she has a right to it or whether it is dangerous, she only gives way; she has become keen on savoring things, on pleasure. Isak might lift her to the ceiling and slam her on the floor once more, oh sure, and still she cannot help herself.

She steps out with the food pack and delivers it.

She had put a washtub by the stairs, in case Gustaf would like to help her carry it to the river for the last time. Maybe she wanted to tell him something, perhaps give him something or other on the sly—the gold ring? God knows, she was capable of anything. But somehow it would have to stop. Gustaf thanks her for the food, says goodbye and goes. And goes.

There she stands.

"Hjalmar!" she cries, oh so needlessly loud. It is as though she rejoices out of sheer spite—or is in distress.

Gustaf goes on his way. . . .

All through the fall the usual work goes on in the whole area, right down to the village; the potatoes are dug up, the grain brought in, the cattle let loose in the fields. There are eight new farms and all are busy, but at Storborg, the trading center, they have no animals and no green fields, only a garden; they don't have trade anymore either, so nobody is busy there.

At Sellanrå they have a new root crop called turnips. It stands green and gigantic in its boggy plot, its leaves swaying, but it is impossible to keep the cows away from it; they break down all the fences and storm in, bellowing. And so Leopoldine and little Rebecca have to keep an eye on the turnip bog, and little Rebecca goes about with a big wand in her hand and is good at chasing cows. Her father is working nearby, and now and then he comes over to feel her hands and feet, asking if she is cold. Leopoldine, who is tall and almost grown-up, is knitting socks and mittens for the winter while keeping an eye on the cows. She was born in Trondhjem and came to Sellanrå at the age of five. The memory of a big city with many people and a long voyage by steamer is slipping away from her now, growing more and more distant; she is a child of the wilds and no longer knows any other outside world than the village down below, where she has been to church a few times and where she was confirmed last year. . . .

And now the incidental tasks present themselves, such as mending the road to the village, which is barely passable in a couple of places. Since the ground is still frostfree, Isak and Sivert go down one day and begin to drain the road. There are two patches of bogs that have to be dried out.

Aksel Strøm has promised to join in this work, because he too has a horse and needs the road; but Aksel had urgent business in town, whatever it might be—it was very urgent, he said. But he has asked his brother at Breidablik to show up in his place at the road repair. His name is Fredrik.

This man is young and newly married, a lighthearted fellow who can tell a joke and be none the worse for it; Sivert and he are alike. Fredrik dropped in on his nearest neighbor, Aaronsen at Storborg, on his way up here this morning, and so he is preoccupied with what the trader had said. It began with Fredrik wanting a roll of tobacco. "I'll make you a present of a roll of tobacco when I

have one," Aaronsen said. "O-o-h, you don't have tobacco, then?"—"No, nor do I want to have any, there's nobody to buy it anyway. What do you think I make on a roll of tobacco?" Aaronsen had obviously been in a bad humor; he felt he had simply been fooled by the Swedish mining company. Here he had settled in the wilds to trade, and then the operation was shut down.

Fredrik laughs good-naturedly at Aaronsen and makes fun of him. "You know, he hasn't done a thing with that land of his," he says, "and he hasn't even got feed for his animals, he buys it! He asked me if he could buy some hay from me. No, I had no hay to sell. 'You mean you don't need money?' Aaronsen said. He thinks having money is everything; tossing a hundred-krone bill on the counter, he said, 'Money!'—'Yes, money is nice,' I said. 'It's absolutely safe!' he said. He really gets to look a bit silly after a while; and his wife goes around with a pocket watch on weekdays—you wonder what urgent times of day she has to keep track of."

"Didn't Aaronsen talk about a certain Geissler?" Sivert asks. "Oh yes. He was the one who refused to sell his mountain, he said. Aaronsen was furious: 'a sheriff removed from office,' he said, 'without so much as a five-krone bill in his wallet perhaps, he should've been shot!'—'You must wait a little while,' I said, 'he'll likely sell later on.'—'No,' Aaronsen said, 'you can forget about that. After all, as a businessman I can figure out that, when one party asks for two hundred fifty thousand and the other party offers twenty-five thousand, the gap between them is too wide and there will be no deal. But good riddance!' said Aaronsen, 'I just wish I'd never set foot in this god-forsaken hole, with my family and all!'—'You aren't thinking of selling, are you?' I asked. 'Yes,' he replied, 'that's exactly what I'm thinking of. This bogland,' he said, 'what a dump, a real desert. I'm not making a krone the livelong day anymore,' he said."

They laughed at Aaronsen and didn't feel sorry for him. "Do you think he'll sell?" Isak asked. "It certainly sounded like it. And he has already gotten rid of his hired man. Yes, that Aaronsen is an odd fellow, a queer sort of man, that's for sure. He gets rid of his hired man, who could keep busy with the firewood for the winter and cart home hay with his own horse, but keeps his assistant. It's probably true he's not selling for a krone a day anymore, there just isn't any merchandise in the store; but what, then, does he need an assistant for? Unless he needs a man who will stand at a desk writing in big ledgers to give himself a superior, high-and-mighty air. Ha-ha-ha! He really acts like he might be just a wee bit crazy, Aaronsen does."

The three men work till noon, eat food from their bags and talk for a short while. They have their own things to discuss, the weal and woe of the backland and its settlers, no trifles that, but matters to be dealt with thoughtfully; they are calm, their nerves are unworn and don't do what they shouldn't. Fall is coming, it is quiet in the woods round about, the mountains are there, the sun is there, and tonight the moon and the stars will come out; it is all unchanging, full of kindness, an embrace. Here folks have time to rest in the heather, with an arm for pillow.

Fredrik talks about Breidablik, he hasn't got very much done down there yet. "Oh yes," Isak says, "you've done a lot already, I could see that when I was down that way." This praise from the oldest settler in the wilds, the champ himself, must have made Fredrik glad, for he asks candidly, "Do you think so? Well, it'll be better, just wait. I wasted so much time this year, the house had to be fixed up, it was leaky and about to fall apart; the hayloft had to be torn down and put up again, and the turf hut was too small for the animals. I now have both a cow and a heifer, which Brede never had in his time," Fredrik says proudly. "Do you like it here?" Isak asks. "Yes, I do, and my wife likes it too, why shouldn't we? It's open country where we are, we can see up and down the road. The little grove by the houses is nice, we think; there are birches and willows, and I'll plant some more on the other side of the yard when I have time. It's terrific the way the bog has dried out only since this spring when I dug the ditches; now the question is what might grow on it the coming year. Like it, sure. As long as my wife and I have a house and a home and land."—"Oh, there will be only the two of you?" Sivert asks roguishly. "No, it may well happen we get to be more, you know," Fredrik replies cheerfully. "And talking about liking it, I've never seen my wife as likable as now."

They work on until evening; now and then they straighten their backs and talk. "Hm, so you didn't get tobacco?" Sivert asks. "No, and I don't really care," Fredrik replies, "I don't use tobacco."—"You don't use tobacco?"—"No. I just wanted to drop in on Aaronsen and hear what he'd got to say." Then the two rascals laughed and had fun.

On the way home, father and son are taciturn as usual, but Isak must have puzzled out something; he says, "Sivert?"—"Yes?" Sivert answers. "Oh, it was nothing." They walk on for a long while, then the father speaks again: "How can Aaronsen trade when he doesn't have any merchandise?"—"Hm," Sivert replies. "You know, there aren't so many people up here to get merchandise for."—"Ah, that's how you see it. Well, I guess you're right." Sivert is a bit surprised by these words. His father continues, "There are only eight homesteads, but more and more might be coming. Well, I don't know." Sivert is even more surprised; what is his father thinking of? Nothing? Father and son walk for a long while again and are nearly home. "Hm. How much do you think Aaronsen will ask for his place?" asks the old man. "That's the question," Sivert answers. "Do you want to buy it?" he says in jest. But suddenly it dawns on him what his father has in mind: it's Eleseus the old man is thinking of. Oh, he has never forgotten him, of course, but thought about him as steadily as his mother, only in his own way, closer to the ground, also closer to Sellanrå. "I suppose the price is reasonable," Sivert says then. And when Sivert says that much, his father understands that he has been understood, and as if afraid of having been too obvious, he immediately changes the subject and says a few words about the road work, that it was good they were finished with it.

For a couple of days, Sivert and his mother were putting their heads together and deliberating; they had much to whisper about and even wrote a letter. When Saturday came around, Sivert felt like going to the village. "What are you going to the village for again, running your boots ragged?" his father asked very angrily, his face looking more gruff than was normal with him; no doubt, he understood that Sivert was going to the post office. "I'm going to church," Sivert replied. There couldn't be a better reason than that, and his father said, "Well, as you like."

However, since Sivert was going to church, he could hitch up and take little Rebecca with him. Little Rebecca certainly deserved to have this bit of fun for once in her life, she had been so good at watching over the turnips and was altogether the gem and star of them all, yes, that she was. They hitched up, and Rebecca had Jensine, the maid, for company, which Sivert didn't object to.

While they are away, the assistant at Storborg happens to come up through the common. What now? Oh, nothing much, just that an assistant, a certain Andresen, came walking along; he is going on a hike to the mountains at the behest of his boss. Nothing more. And the incident creates no great stir in the minds of the Sellanrå folks; it is not as in the old days, when the sight of a stranger was a rare event on the farm, causing Inger to grow more or less flustered. No, Inger has seen the error of her ways again and remains calm.

A queer thing that prayer book, a guide, a sort of arm around her neck! When Inger had lost hold of herself and gone astray berrying, she found her way home again by recalling her little room and the prayer book; at the moment she was once more subdued and godfearing. She remembers those years long ago when she was sewing; pricking herself on a needle one day, she said, "Damn it!" She had picked it up from her fellow sisters at the large tailor's table. Now when she pricks herself on a needle, she bleeds and sucks the blood in silence. It cost her no little effort to change herself in this respect. Inger went even further. When the workers were gone and the cow barn was finished and Sellanrå lay there all deserted once again, Inger went through a crisis, cried a lot and felt wretched. She blamed no one but herself for her despair, and she was most humble. If only she could speak to Isak and ease her heart, but that sort of thing wasn't done at Sellanrå; they didn't talk about their feelings or confess anything. So she would make an extra effort when letting her husband know it was mealtime, going right up to him to invite him in instead of calling from the door slab, and in the evenings she would check his clothes and sew on buttons. But Inger did even more; one night she got up on her elbow and said to her husband, "Isak?"—"What is it?" Isak asks. "Oh, you're awake?"—"Well?"—"Oh, nothing," Inger says. "But I haven't been as I should."—"What?" Isak asks. It escaped him, and he too got up on his elbow. They went on talking; in spite of all, she was an incredible woman and her heart was full. "I haven't been as I should toward you," she says. "I feel so sorry!" These simple words touch him, touch the water troll, and he does his best to comfort Inger; he doesn't understand what it is all about, only that there is nobody like her. "You mustn't cry about that," Isak says, "we're none of us as we should be."—"Well, no," she answers gratefully. Oh, Isak had such a sound understanding of everything, he righted things when they went awry. Who is as we should be? He was right; after all, the god of the heart himself, who still is god, goes in search of adventure, as shown by his madcap behavior: one day he is bobbing in a heap of roses, licking his chops and rocking himself; the next day he has got a thorn in his foot and makes a desperate face pulling it out. Does he die of it? Not a bit, he is none the worse. It would be a fine kettle of fish if he died.

Things righted themselves for Inger too, she is getting over it; but she continues with her hours of devotion, which give her a sense of merciful security. Inger is hard-working and patient and kind every day; she knows Isak from all other men and wants nothing but him. True, he is no wizard or troubadour to look at, but he is good enough—ho, she should say so! And it is again borne out that godliness with contentment is great gain.

One Sunday that little assistant from Storborg, that Andresen fellow, came to Sellanrå, and Inger didn't get flustered, far from it; she didn't even bother to bring him a bowl of milk but sent Leopoldine in with it, since the hired girl was out. And Leopoldine, of course, could carry a bowl of milk well enough and said "please" and turned red in the face, although she was dressed in her Sunday best and had nothing to be ashamed of. "Thanks, that's far too much!" Andresen said. "Is your father home?" he said. "Yes, he must be out there somewhere." Andresen drank, wiped his mouth with his handkerchief and looked at his watch. "Is it far up to the mines?" he said. "No. It's an hour's walk, or even less."—"I'm on my way up to look them over for Aaronsen, I'm his assistant."—"I see."—"You know me, don't you? I'm Aaronsen's assistant. You've shopped in our store."—"Yes."—"I remember you very well," Andresen said, "you've been there twice and shopped."—"That you should remember me is more than I would expect," Leopoldine replied, but then she had almost no strength left and stood holding on to a chair. Andresen had strength to spare; keeping at it, he said, "Shouldn't I remember you!" And he went on to say, "You couldn't go with me up to the mountain, could you?"

Little by little a strange red haze appeared before Leopoldine's eyes, and the floor was slipping away from under her as she heard Andresen, the assistant, speak from ever so far away. "You don't have time?"—"No," she replied. God knows how she managed to get to the kitchen. Her mother looked at her and asked, "What's wrong with you?"—"Nothing."

Nothing, indeed! Obviously it was now Leopoldine's turn to be flustered, to begin the cycle. She was well suited for it, lanky, good-looking and newly confirmed, she would be a nice quarry, all right. A bird is quivering in her young breast, her long hands are full of tenderness, like her mother's, full of sex. Couldn't she dance? Oh yes. It was a marvel how they learned it, but learn it they did at Sellanrå too; Sivert could dance and Leopoldine, too. It was a dance created in the backland, a vigorous hoofing it peculiar to the place—schottische, mazurka, polka and waltz all in one. And didn't Leopoldine know how to deck herself out and fall in love and dream wide-awake? Just like anyone else! The day she was confirmed she borrowed her mother's gold ring—there was no sin in that, it was simply pretty; but the next day, going to communion, she put the ring on only when it was all over. Why shouldn't she wear a gold ring standing in the aisle at confirmation, she was the daughter of a powerful man, the margrave.

When Andresen returned from the mountain, he met Isak and was invited in. He was offered dinner and coffee. All the Sellanrå folks were there and took part in the conversation. Andresen explained that Aaronsen had sent him up to investigate what the state of the mines was, whether there were any signs that operation would resume and work start again. God knows, maybe Andresen was lying through his teeth about having been sent; the trip could just as well have been dreamed up by himself. In any case, he couldn't have gone all the way up to the mines and back in the short time he was away. "It's none too easy to tell from the look of things if the company will start again," Isak said. True, Andresen admitted, but Aaronsen had indeed sent him; and anyway, two pairs of eyes can see more than one.

But now Inger couldn't hold back any longer and asked, "Is it true what folks are saying, that Aaronsen wants to sell?"—"He's thinking about it," Andresen replies. "And a man like him can do as he likes, of course, he's got the means."—"Oh, he has lots of money?"—"Yes," Andresen replies, nodding, "there's nothing wanting there, for sure." Again Inger cannot keep silent and asks, "Do you know how much he is asking for his place?" Then Isak cuts in; he may be even more curious than Inger, but it must not seem like the idea of buying Storborg originated with him, so he acts as though he knows nothing about it and says, "Why are you asking, Inger?"—"Oh, I'm just asking," she answers. They both look expectantly at Andresen. Then he answers.

He answers rather guardedly that he doesn't know the price, but he knows what Aaronsen himself has said that Storborg has cost him. "How much?" Inger asks, unable to keep her mouth shut and be silent. "Sixteen hundred kroner," Andresen replies, causing Inger to clap her hands. If there is one thing women lack, it is just this: they have no sense or understanding of farm prices. However, sixteen hundred kroner is no small sum for folk in the wilds, and Inger is only afraid of one thing: that Isak will be frightened off. But Isak sits there like a rock and merely says, "It's those big houses."—"Yes," says Andresen too, "it's those huge houses!"

A moment before Andresen leaves, Leopoldine has slipped out the door. Strange though it may seem, she evidently finds it impossible to shake his hand. But she has found herself a good spot, standing in the new cow barn looking out a window. She has a blue silk ribbon around her neck, which she didn't have before, and the remarkable thing is that she has found time to put it on. There he passes by, rather small and chubby, with vigorous legs, a blond full beard, eight or ten years older than her. To her thinking, he is not unattractive.

And then, late in the night to Monday, the churchgoers came back. All had gone well, little Rebecca had slept the last few hours of the way up, and she was lifted off the cart and carried in asleep. Sivert has heard a lot of news, but when his mother asks, "What did you hear?" he simply answers, "Nothing much. Aksel has got a mowing machine and a disc harrow."—"What are you saying?" his father asks, interested. "Did you see them with your own eyes?"—"I saw them. They were standing on the dock."—"Ah, that was his business in town!" his father says. And Sivert sits there, swelling with knowing better, but doesn't utter another word.

His father was welcome to think that Aksel Strøm's pressing business in town was to buy a mowing machine and a harrow; his mother was also welcome to think so. But neither parent believed it, having no doubt heard a rumor that it was connected with another case of infanticide in the backland. "Well, now you must go to bed," his father says at last.

Sivert goes to bed, swelling with knowledge. Aksel had been summoned to a hearing, it was a big case, the sheriff had gone off with him. It was such a big case that the sheriff's wife, who had recently had another baby, had abandoned the child and gone into town with him. She had promised to say a word or two to the jury.

Gossip and rumors were circulating in the village, and Sivert noticed well enough that a certain earlier infanticide was remembered anew. Outside the church, conversation stopped when he approached, and if he hadn't been the man he was, people might have turned away from him. It was good to be Sivert: to begin with, he was from a large farm, a rich man's son; next, he was himself a capable fellow, a worker who was ahead of the others and enjoyed their respect. He had also always been popular. If only Jensine didn't get to hear too much before they returned home! Sivert had his own reason to be anxious; folks in the wild can also blush and pale. He saw Jensine leave the church with little Rebecca; she had seen him, too, but had just gone by. He waits a while before driving over to the blacksmith's house to pick up the two of them.

They are at table, the whole family are having dinner. Sivert is also offered food, but he has eaten, thanks! They knew he would be coming, they could have waited a little while; at Sellanrå they would have, but here they didn't. "I suppose it's not the sort of food that you're used to," says the blacksmith's wife. "What news from church?" the blacksmith asks, though he had been to church himself.

When Jensine and little Rebecca are seated in the cart, the blacksmith's wife says to her daughter, "Well, Jensine, don't wait too long before you come home again." That can be understood in two ways, Sivert must have thought, leaving it at that. But if she had been a little more plain-spoken, he might have replied. He knits his brows and waits, nothing more.

As they drive homeward, little Rebecca is the only one who has anything to say; she is full of her church adventure, the pastor in his gown with a silver cross, the chandelier, the organ. After a long while Jensine says, "This thing with Barbro, what a shame!"—"What did your mother mean by saying you should come home again soon?" Sivert asks. "What she meant?"—"Will you be leaving?"—"I suppose I'll have to go home sometime," she replies. "Whoa," Sivert says, stopping his horse. "Would you like me to drive back with you now?" Jensine looks at him, he is deathly pale. "No," she replies. A minute later she begins to cry. Rebecca looks in surprise from one to the other. Oh, little Rebecca was extremely good to have on a journey like that; she sided with Jensine, patted her and made her smile again. And when she threatened her brother and said she would jump off and find a good birch rod for him, Sivert too had to smile. "But now I must ask what *you* meant," Jensine said. Sivert replied without hesitation, "I meant that, if you want to leave, we must try to manage without you." After a long while Jensine says, "Well, Leopoldine is grown-up now and can do my work."

It was a cheerless return home.



## VII

A man walks up through the common. It is a wet, windy day, the fall rain has set in; but the man doesn't care, he looks glad, and so he is. It is Aksel Strøm—he has been in court, where he was interrogated, and has been found guiltless. He is glad, indeed: first, there is a mowing machine and a harrow waiting for him down at the dock and, second, he has been cleared of guilt. He hadn't been a party to murdering a child. These things will happen!

But what a time he has been through! When he stood up and testified, this ceaseless toiler was undertaking the hardest job of his whole life. He wouldn't benefit from increasing Barbro's guilt, so he was very careful not to say too much, he didn't even reveal all he knew; every word had to be dragged out of him and he answered mostly with yes and no. Wasn't that enough? Was the case to be made bigger than it already was? Oh, there was many a time when it looked as if his situation might get serious; the high officials in their black robes looked so dangerous, they could have made it all turn out for the worst with a few words and perhaps had him convicted. But they were kindly people and didn't seek his ruin. And besides, as it happened, there were powerful forces operating to save Barbro, which he, too, would benefit from.

So what on earth was he worried about?

Barbro would hardly allow herself to give testimony to the detriment of her former master and sweetheart; he possessed a terrible knowledge of both this case and an earlier one involving a baby, and she wasn't stupid. No, Barbro was smart enough, she praised Aksel and said that he didn't know anything at all about her delivery until after it was over. He was a bit peculiar and they didn't get along, but he was a quiet man and absolutely first-rate. No, it was only long afterward that he had dug a new grave and hidden the body in it; that was because he didn't think the first grave was dry enough, although it was. It was just that Aksel was so peculiar.

So what did Aksel have to worry about when Barbro assumed the whole burden? And as for Barbro herself, there were mighty forces at work. Mrs. Heyerdahl, the sheriff's wife, was at work.

She went to high and low and didn't spare herself, requested to be examined as a witness and made a speech in court. When her turn came, she stood there at the bar as a great lady and took up the question of infanticide in all its breadth, giving the court quite a show; it was as if she had obtained permission to do so in advance. Whatever you might think about the sheriff's wife, she did know how to speak and was well versed in politics and social questions. Where she got her words from was a real wonder. Now and then the presiding judge seemed to try to bring her back to the matter in hand, but apparently he hadn't the heart to interrupt her and let her go on. And at the end she came out with a couple of useful pieces of information and made a sensational offer to the court.

It all occurred—apart from tedious legal technicalities—as follows:

"We women," Mrs. Heyerdahl said, "are an unhappy, subjugated half of humanity. It's the men who make the laws, we women have no influence on that. But can a man realize what it means for a woman to give birth? Has he felt the anxiety, has he felt the terrible pain and suffering and uttered the screams?"

"In this instance it is a servant girl who has given birth. She is unmarried, so she must all the time try to hide that she is with child. Why must she hide it? Because of society. Society despises the unmarried woman who is going to have a baby. Not only does it fail to protect her, but it persecutes her with contempt and shame. Isn't it appalling? It's enough to make every human being with a heart feel outraged! The girl is not only to bring a child into the world, which would seem more than hard enough in itself, but she is to be treated as a criminal for it. I do not hesitate to say it was a piece of good luck for the accused that her child was by accident born in a creek and was suffocated. It was lucky both for herself and for the child. As long as society is the way it is now, an unmarried woman ought to be exempt from punishment even for killing her child."

A slight murmur is heard from the presiding judge.

"Or in any case be punished very mildly," Mrs. Heyerdahl said. "We all agree, of course, that the children's lives must be preserved," she said, "but is every humane law to be suspended in regard to the unfortunate mother? Try to imagine what she has been through during her pregnancy, what anguish she has suffered in trying to hide her condition, being at a loss what to do with herself and the baby that is coming. No man can imagine that," she said. "In any case, the death of the child is kindly meant. The mother doesn't wish to do herself and her dear child the harm of letting it live, the shame is too much of a burden; meanwhile her plan to kill the child matures. And so she gives birth clandestinely, and for twenty-four hours she is so delirious that she's not accountable for her actions when the killing takes place. She has, so to speak, almost not done it, being delirious at the time. With every bone in her body still aching after the delivery, she must now kill the child and get rid of the body. Just imagine the effort of will demanded for this task! Naturally, we all wish children to live, and it is deplorable that some of them are done away with. But that is the fault of society, this ill-natured, unmerciful, hopeless society, with its scandal-mongering and persecution mania, a society that is ever on guard and ready to destroy an unmarried mother with all the means at its disposal."

"But even after such treatment by society, the ill-used mothers can rise again. It often happens that these girls begin to show their best and most noble qualities precisely after their social lapse. The jury could ask any manageress of an institution that accepts mothers with children whether this is true or not. And experience has shown that just those girls who have—well, whom society has forced to kill their own children, make such excellent nursemaids. That, I believe, should give food for thought to one and all."

"Another side to the question is this: Why is the man to go free? The mother who commits infanticide is thrown in prison and tortured, but the alleged father, the seducer, is never touched. But seeing that he is the child's origin, he has a share in the murder, and the larger share: without him, the misfortune would not have occurred. So, why does he go free as the breeze? Because the laws are made by men. There you have the answer. We are at a pass where we have to invoke heaven's protection against these man-made laws! And it will not get better until we women join in and get a say in the elections and in parliament.

"But," Mrs. Heyerdahl said, "seeing that this cruel lot befalls the guilty—or more guilty—unwed mother who commits infanticide, what are we to think of the innocent one who is suspected of murder but has not committed it? What redress does society offer to such a victim? None at all! I can testify that I know the girl accused before us; I have known her since childhood, she has been in my service, and her father is my husband's bailiff. We women allow ourselves to think and feel in direct opposition to men's accusations and persecutions, we allow ourselves to have an opinion about things. That girl has been arrested, deprived of her freedom on suspicion, first, of having borne a child clandestinely and, further, of having killed her child. She has—and I don't have a shadow of a doubt on this—she has done neither; the jury will, in turn, arrive at this self-evident conclusion. Clandestine birth? She gives birth in broad daylight. True, she is alone, but who could have been with her? It is way up in the wilderness, the only human being there beside herself is a man—could she have sent for him at such a moment? To us women, the very idea seems outrageous, we lower our eyes at such an idea. So, are we to assume that she killed the child? It is born in a creek, she gives birth as she lies there in the ice-cold water. What is she doing at the creek? She is a servant girl, a slave, that is, and she has her daily chores; now she needs juniper from the forest for cleaning her wooden vessels. As she is about to cross the creek, she loses her footing and falls into the water. And there she lies. The child is born and is suffocated in the water."

The sheriff's wife stops. She could tell by the reaction of the court and the audience that she had spoken exceptionally well, it was so quiet in the courtroom; as for Barbro, she was dabbing at her eyes now and again, overcome by emotion. The lady finished with these words: "We women have a heart. I have left my children in the hands of strangers to travel here and testify in behalf of this unfortunate girl sitting there. Men's laws cannot forbid women to think, and I think that this girl has been punished enough for having done nothing wrong whatsoever. Acquit her, then, and I will take her into my home. She will be the finest nursemaid I have ever had."

The lady stops.

The presiding judge remarks, "Well, but according to your statements it was, after all, those who *did* kill their children who became such fine nursemaids?" Not that the judge disagreed with Mrs. Heyerdahl, far from it; he was so very humane himself, so clerically mild. During the few questions which the prosecuting attorney directed to the lady afterward, the presiding judge was mostly making notes on some papers.

The proceedings were over by noon, or a little later; the witnesses were so few and the case was so obviously clear. Aksel Strøm was hoping for the best, but suddenly the sheriff's wife and the prosecuting attorney seemed to join forces to get him into trouble, because he had buried the dead child instead of reporting the death. He was questioned rather sharply on this point, and he might not have managed very well if he hadn't caught sight of Geissler in the room, sitting some way off. Quite right: Geissler was there. This gave Aksel a sort of support, he no longer felt alone against a legal authority that had it in for him. Geissler nodded to him.

Oh yes, Geissler had shown up in town. He didn't get around to signing up as a witness, but he was present. He had also used a few days before the trial to familiarize himself with the case and write down what he could remember of the story Aksel himself had told him at Måneland. In Geissler's eyes, most of the documents were rubbish; Sheriff Heyerdahl was a very narrow-minded person whose criminal investigation was based on the assumption that Aksel was privy to the infanticide. That fool, that idiot, had no knowledge of life in the wilds; he failed to understand that the child was the very bond which was supposed to tie the hired girl down to Aksel's farm.

Geissler had a word with the prosecuting attorney, but he received the impression that it hadn't been necessary: he wanted to help Aksel get back to his upcountry farm again, but Aksel didn't need any help. After all, the outlook for Barbro herself seemed wonderfully bright, and if she was acquitted there would be no question of any complicity on Aksel's part. It would all depend on the testimony, of course.

When the few witnesses had been heard, the sheriff, Aksel, the experts, a couple of girls from the village—Oline had not been called in—when they had been heard, it was time for the afternoon break, and Geissler went again to see the prosecuting attorney. Well, the attorney was of the opinion that Barbro's prospects were still bright, a good thing indeed. Mrs. Heyerdahl's testimony had carried great weight. It all depended on the jury, of course.

"Do you take a special interest in this girl?" the prosecuting attorney asked. "In a way," Geissler replied. "Or particularly in the man, perhaps."—"Was she in your service, too, at one time?"—"No, he was never in my service."—"Oh, the man. But what about the girl? She's the one who has the sympathy of the court."—"No, she has never been in my service."—"The man is more dubious," the attorney said. "He goes off all by himself and buries the dead child in the woods. That is suspicious."—"I suppose he wanted to bury it properly," Geissler said, "that hadn't been done the first time."—"Well, she was a woman and lacked a man's strength to dig. And in her condition, she wasn't able to do more. Altogether," the attorney said, "we have worked our way to a more humane view of these infanticide cases. If I were a member of the jury, I wouldn't presume to condemn the girl, and considering the information that we have, I dare not demand her conviction."—"That's very gratifying," Geissler said, bowing. The prosecutor continued, "As a human being and a private person I would go even further: I wouldn't condemn a single unwed mother who killed her child."—"It's

interesting," Geissler said, "that you, as prosecutor, and the lady who testified today are in such agreement."—"Oh, she! By the way, she spoke well, in fact. No, but what is the point of all these convictions? Unwed mothers have suffered such unheard-of torments beforehand, and been brought so low in every human regard by the harshness and brutality of the world, that this is punishment enough." Geissler got up and finally said, "But what about the children?"—"Yes," the prosecutor replied, "it's sad about the children. Still, all things considered, it may be a blessing. Look at those illegitimate children, how do they fare in life? What becomes of them?" Geissler may have felt like teasing the affable man a little, or maybe he just tried to make himself deep and mysterious; he said, "Erasmus was a bastard child."—"Erasmus?"—"Erasmus of Rotterdam."—"Hm."—"Leonardo was a bastard."—"Leonardo da Vinci? Really? Well, there are exceptions, of course, otherwise there would be no rule. By and large, it still holds!"—"We protect birds and beasts," Geissler said, "it looks a bit odd not to protect babies." Slowly and with dignity, the prosecutor reached for some papers on the table, indicating that he had to interrupt. "Yes," he said absently, "well, yes." Geissler thanked him for the extremely instructive conversation he had been afforded and left.

He took a seat in the courtroom again, to be there on time. He must have been tickled by the idea of being quite powerful: he had knowledge of a certain cut-off shirt to carry, er, twigs for a broom in, and of the body of a dead child that was once adrift in the Stadt Sea. He could embarrass the court, a word from him now could be as good as a thousand swords. But evidently Geissler didn't intend to utter this word unless it became necessary. After all, the prospects were splendid, even the public prosecutor sided with the accused.

The hall fills up and the court convenes again.

It turned into an interesting small-town comedy, with the admonishing seriousness of the prosecutor pitted against the stirring eloquence of the counsel for the defense. The jury listened to what they were supposed to think about the girl Barbro and her child's death.

Not that it was all that easy to find this out. The prosecutor was a handsome-looking man and doubtless also a good person, but something must have annoyed him recently, or it had occurred to him that he had to defend his own place in the Norwegian administration of justice, God knows. It was incomprehensible, but he was not as amenable as in the morning; he criticized the misdeed if, in fact, it had been committed. Indeed, he said, it was a dark page, if it could definitely be shown to be as dark as the sworn testimony led one to think and believe. That was something for the jury to decide. He wished to draw attention to three points: the first point was whether there had been a clandestine birth, whether this question was clear to the court. He made some personal remarks. The second point was the cloth, this half shirt—why had the accused taken it with her? Was it in the expectation that she would need it? He developed this further. The third point was the hasty and suspicious burial, without the death being reported to either the pastor or the sheriff. Here the man on the premises was the main party, and it was of the utmost importance that the jury arrive at the correct decision in regard to this. For it was obvious that, if the man was privy to what had occurred and had therefore undertaken the burial on his own, then his hired girl must have committed a crime to which he had become privy.

"Hm!" came from somewhere in the room.

Aksel Strøm realized that he was again in danger; looking up, he didn't meet a single glance, all eyes were fixed on the speaker. But far back in the hall sat Geissler once again, looking extremely superior, as if bursting with self-importance, his lower lip thrust forward and his face turned toward the ceiling. This immense indifference to the gravity of the court and this loud "hm!" sent aloft had a stimulating effect on Aksel; he no longer felt himself pitted against the whole world.

And now things came around, the prosecutor finally deciding enough was enough; he had managed to spread so much suspicion and ill feeling against Aksel as he possibly could, but now he stopped. In fact, he somehow made a complete about-face: he did not ask for conviction. He ended by saying, in no uncertain terms, that, given the testimony in the case, he did not, for his part, dare demand that the accused be condemned.

That is welcome news, Aksel must have thought, now there will be an end of it!

Then the counsel for the defense set to work—a young man who had learned to be a lawyer and was charged with the defense in this capital case. The result was as might be expected: never had a man been more certain of defending innocence than he. In reality, Mrs. Heyerdahl, the sheriff's wife, had stolen a march on him and cribbed several arguments from him this morning; he was displeased that she had exploited the subject of society—oh, he himself had so much to tell society! He was annoyed with the presiding judge, who had failed to stop her speech; it was, after all, a statement she presented, an obvious plea, so what was left for him?

He began with the beginning of Barbro Bredesen's life. She was from a family of humble means, though her parents were hard-working and respectable; she went into service at an early age, at first in the sheriff's household. "We have heard this morning what her mistress, Mrs. Heyerdahl, thought of her; it couldn't have been more favorable. Barbro came to Bergen." The counsel called attention to the deeply felt testimonial of two clerks who had employed her in a position of trust while she was in Bergen. Barbro came back home to start as housekeeper for a bachelor in an outlying area. Here began her misfortune.

She found herself with child by this bachelor. The honorable prosecutor had suggested—in the most judicious and considerate manner, incidentally—concealment of birth. Had Barbro concealed her condition, had she denied it? The two witnesses, girls from her native village, had said they realized she was pregnant, and when they asked her she had denied nothing but only laughed it off. "That is how young girls deal with such things, they laugh it off." No one else had asked Barbro. Had she gone to her mistress to confess? She had no mistress. She was a mistress herself. She had a master, but a young girl does not go to a man with that kind of

secret, she bears the cross herself: she doesn't sing, she doesn't whisper, she is a Trappist. She doesn't go into hiding, but she keeps to herself.

"The child is born, a fully developed and well-formed boy; he lived and breathed after birth, but he got suffocated. The jury are acquainted with the circumstances of this birth, which occurred in water; the mother fell into the creek and gave birth, she is powerless to save the child. She just lies there, unable even to save herself onto the bank till afterward. Well, no trace of violence to the child can be detected, it has no marks, nobody intended its death, it was suffocated by the water. It is the most natural explanation imaginable."

The honorable prosecutor alluded to a cloth; supposedly, it was an obscure point why she had taken this half shirt with her on her walk. Nothing could be clearer than this obscurity: she had taken the cloth along to strip juniper into it. She could have taken—let us say a pillowcase, but she took a piece of cloth for it. She had to have something, she couldn't carry stripped juniper in her hands. No, here the jury could feel confident!

But there was another point that was not quite so clear: did the accused have the support and care which her condition required at the time? "Did her master show her some consideration? If he did, fine! During the interrogation the girl has spoken about her master with appreciation, which should indicate that she has a kind and noble disposition. Nor has the man, Aksel Strøm, in his depositions added to the burden of the accused and blamed her—and in this he has most certainly done the right thing, not to say the wise thing: it is she who will save him. Laying as much blame as possible on her would, if it led to her downfall, pull him down with her.

"It is impossible to immerse oneself in the documents of the case at hand without feeling the most profound compassion with this young girl in her abandonment. And yet she does not need to invoke mercy, but only justice and understanding. She and her master are in a way betrothed to one another, but disagreements and a profound difference in their interests exclude marriage. This girl cannot find her future with this man. Though it is not pleasant to have to do so, let us go back to the matter of the piece of cloth she brought along, not to miss anything: the girl had taken along not one of her own shifts, but one of her master's shirts. We asked ourselves at the start: Had this shirt been placed at her disposal? Here, we thought, there *could* be a possibility that the man, Aksel, had had a hand in it."

"Hm!" was heard down the hall. It was so harsh and loud that it caused the speaker to stop; all eyes searched for the source of this interruption. The presiding judge frowned.

"But"—the counsel for the defense continued after collecting himself—"also on this point we can be easy in our minds, thanks to the accused herself. Though it should be in her interest to split the blame in this respect, she has not done so. She has very firmly exempted Aksel Strøm from any knowledge of her taking his shirt instead of her own shift along to the creek—I mean to the woods to gather juniper. There is no reason whatever to doubt the words of the accused, they have held good all the way and do so here as well: if she had received the shirt from the man's hand, this would have presupposed an act of infanticide, and in her truthfulness the accused refuses to help convict even this man for a crime that did not take place. On the whole, she has explained herself honestly and candidly, without trying to lay the blame on someone else. This trait of behaving decently recurs in everything she does; thus, she swathed the dead child in the best possible way, taking great pains to do so. That is how the sheriff found it in the grave."

The presiding judge wishes—as a matter of form—to draw attention to the fact that it was grave No. 2 which the sheriff found, and there it was Aksel who had buried the child.

"Yes, that is true, and I thank Your Honor!" the defense attorney says, with all the deference owed to the administration of justice. Yes, that was true. But Aksel himself had explained that he simply took the dead body over to the new grave and laid it there. "And without a doubt a woman can swathe a child better than a man, and who can swathe it best of all? Surely the mother with her tender hands!"

The presiding judge nods.

"And by the way, couldn't this girl—if she had been of that sort—have buried the child naked? I will go as far as to say that she could have put it in a trash can. She could have left it on the ground under a tree to let it freeze to death—that is, if it had not already been dead. She could have put it in the oven at a time when she was alone and burned it. She could have taken it up to Sellanrå and thrown it into the river. This mother did none of these things, she swathed the dead child and buried it. And it was neatly swathed when it was found, it was a woman and not a man who had swathed it."

Now, the counsel for the defense said, the jury had to decide what guilt remained on the part of the girl, Barbro. In truth, little remained; in the best judgment of the counsel, none remained. Unless the jury would convict her for having failed to report the death. But again, the child was dead, they were far up in the wilderness, many miles from either pastor or sheriff, and so she let it sleep its eternal sleep in a good grave in the woods. If it was a crime to bury it there, the accused shared it with the child's father; but that crime, at least, had to be forgivable. "One has more and more abandoned the practice of punishing crimes, one reforms the criminals. In the old days one could be punished for all sorts of things, in accordance with the doctrine of retaliation in the Old Testament: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. This is no longer the spirit of our legislation. The modern administration of justice is humane, it seeks to adapt itself to the more or less criminal *disposition* that the individual concerned may have displayed.

"Therefore, do not condemn this girl!" the counsel for the defense said. "We do not need to have one more criminal, what we need is to give back to society a good and useful member." The counsel pointed out that the accused would now receive the most careful supervision in a new position she had been offered: Mrs. Heyerdahl had, on the basis of her long-standing acquaintance with Barbro

and her rich experience as a mother, thrown the doors of her home wide open for her. Conscious of the weight of its responsibility, the jury would either convict or acquit her. Finally, the counsel wished to thank his colleague, the public prosecutor, for not demanding a conviction. That manifested a profoundly humane understanding.

The counsel for the defense sat down.

The rest of the proceedings didn't take much time; the charge to the jury was the same thing over again, seen from two sides: a brief summary of the substance of the play, dry, tedious and dignified. Everything had gone very nicely; both the prosecutor and the counsel for the defense had touched on the judge's domain and made his task an easy one.

Lights were made; a couple of lamps beamed from the ceiling, giving a miserable light, so weak that the presiding judge seemed unable to read his notes by it. He criticized rather severely the failure to report the child's death to the authorities; but, he said, under the existing circumstances it really had to be the father's business and not the mother's, since she was too weak to do so. Then it was up to the jury to decide whether a charge of concealment of birth and infanticide had been proven. The question was once again explained from one end to the other. Thereafter came the usual injunction to be conscious of their responsibility, which had been impressed upon the jury before, and finally the not unfamiliar advice that, in case of doubt, the decision should benefit the accused.

Now it was all done.

The jury left the hall and entered a cabinet. They were going to discuss a paper with certain questions which one of them had taken with him. They were away for five minutes and came back with a no to all the questions.

No, the girl Barbro had not killed her child.

Then the presiding judge spoke another few words and declared that the girl Barbro was free.

The people left the hall. The comedy was over. . . .

Someone takes Aksel Strøm by the arm, it is Geissler. "So, you're rid of the case at last!" he said. "Yes," Aksel said. "But, of course, they have wasted your time to no purpose."—"Yes," Aksel said again. But now he had recovered somewhat and added, "But I must say I feel glad that I got off."—"Got off, why shouldn't you!" Geissler said, emphasizing every word. This gave Aksel the impression that Geissler must have had something to do with the case, that he had intervened. God knows if, in reality, it wasn't Geissler who had guided the entire court and produced the result he wanted. It was a mystery.

Aksel understood enough, however, to know that Geissler had stood by him all day. "Hm, I'm very beholden to you," he said, trying to take his hand. "What for?" Geissler asked. "For—well, for everything." Geissler brushed the matter aside, saying shortly, "I've done nothing. I didn't bother to do anything, it wasn't worth it." But for all that, maybe Geissler didn't mind being thanked; it was as though he had expected it, and now it had come. "I don't have time to talk to you any more just now," he said. "Are you going back tomorrow? That's good. So long!" Geissler strolled down the street. . . .

On the steamer going home, Aksel met the sheriff and his wife, Barbro, and the two girls who had testified. "Well," the sheriff's wife said, "aren't you happy about the outcome?" Aksel replied that, yes, he couldn't help being happy that it was over. The sheriff himself opened his mouth to say, "This is the second case involving a child I've had in the backland; the first one had to do with Inger Sellaanrå, and now I'm through with the second one. No, it won't do to get away with that sort of thing, justice must be served!"

But the sheriff's wife realized, no doubt, that Aksel was not overly pleased by her testimony yesterday, and now she wanted to smooth it over, to make up for it. "Well, I suppose you understood why I said those unfavorable things about you?"—"Yes. Oh, yes," Aksel replied. "You must've understood. Did you think I had it in for you? Let me tell you, I've always regarded you as an excellent man."—"Oh," Aksel said, no more, but he felt both touched and glad. "Yes, I have indeed," said the sheriff's wife. "But I was forced to put some blame on you, otherwise Barbro would've been convicted and you along with her. It was done with the best intention on my part."—"Well, thank you very much."—"It was I and no one else who went from pillar to post in town and used my influence in favor of you both. And you must've noticed that all those of us who spoke had to put some blame on you to get you both off."—"Yes," Aksel said. "Surely you didn't think for a moment that I meant you any harm, eh? Having always regarded you as an excellent man and all!"

That felt good after all the humiliation. In any case, Aksel was so touched that he would definitely give the sheriff's wife something, whatever it might be, show his gratitude by giving her something or other, perhaps a piece of beef this fall. He had a one-year-old bullock.

Mrs. Heyerdahl kept her word: she took Barbro into her home. She also looked after her aboard the ship and wouldn't allow her to be either cold or hungry; nor did she permit her to flirt with the mate, who was from Bergen. The first time it occurred she didn't say anything, only called on Barbro to join her. But when she saw Barbro flirting with him again, smiling and speaking in Bergen dialect, her head tilted, Mrs. Heyerdahl called her and said, "I don't think you should be chatting with men right now, Barbro. Remember what you've just been through and where you're coming from."—"I could hear he was from Bergen, and so I spoke to him," Barbro replied.

Aksel didn't talk to her. He noticed that her skin was pale and soft and that she had acquired nice teeth. She was wearing neither of his rings. . . . And now Aksel is tramping up through the common. It blows and rains, but he is happy as a lark; he has seen the mowing machine and the disc harrow down on the dock. Oh, that Geissler! He hadn't said a word in town just now about the big shipment. He was a strange gentleman.

## VIII

Aksel didn't get a very long rest at home; with the stormy fall weather began a spell of personal difficulty and vexation for which he himself was responsible: the telegraph on his wall reported that the line was out of order.

Oh, he may have been too greedy for money when he took over this job. It had been disagreeable from the very beginning; Brede Olsen had flatly threatened him when he came to pick up the tools and things that went with the telegraph. He had said, "You don't seem to remember that I saved your life last winter."—"It was Oline who saved my life," Aksel replied. "Really. Didn't I carry you home on my own poor back? Anyway, you saw your chance to buy my farm in the summertime so I would be without a roof over my head come winter!" Brede was deeply offended. "Just go ahead and take the telegraph," he said, "along with the whole kit and caboodle. I and my family will move to the village and start something there, something you have no idea about; it will be like a hotel, a place where folks can buy coffee. We'll manage, don't you worry! My wife can sell consumables of all kinds, and I myself can travel about on business and make much more money than you. But take it from me, Aksel, I could play many a trick on you, being so familiar with the telegraph and all; I could bring down poles and break the cable. Then you would have to rush off in the middle of the work season. Take that from me and bear it in mind. . . ."

Well, Aksel should have picked up the machines from the dock— oh, they were both as gilded and full of color as a picture—he could have had them today, looked them over and familiarized himself with their uses, but now they had to wait. He felt bad about having to neglect necessary work in order to inspect the telegraph line. But it was that money.

On top of the mountain he runs across Aaronsen; Aaronsen, the storekeeper, stands there looking about him, trying to see things in the storm, while looking a sight himself. What did he want there? He probably couldn't find a moment's peace any longer, but set out for the mountain in order to examine the mines himself. In doing so, mind you, the storekeeper acted out of sheer solicitude for his own and his family's future. There he stands on the abandoned mountain, face-to-face with nothing but squalor and destruction: rusting machinery, rolling stock, carriages, much of it standing in the open—it was altogether hopeless. Here and there on the walls of the barracks were posted handwritten notices which prohibited making off with or damaging the company's tools, wagons or buildings.

Chatting briefly with the crazy huckster, Aksel asks, "Out shooting, are you?"—"Oh, if only I could get to him!" Aaronsen replies. "Who would you like to get to?"—"Who? The one who is ruining both me and everyone else hereabouts. The one who refused to sell his mountain and bring activity and trade and money among people."—"You mean Geissler?"—"Yes, I mean that fellow, exactly. He should be shot!" Aksel laughs and says, "Geissler was in town a few days ago, you could've met him there. But in my humble opinion, I don't think you should bother about that man."—"Why not?" Aaronsen asks angrily. "I'm afraid he would be too much of a big shot and a bit too hard to figure out for you." They quarreled about this for a while, and Aaronsen became more and more vehement. Finally Aksel asked in jest, "You don't mean to leave us, do you, and make us all completely helpless here in the wilds?"—"Do you really think I'll stay here and mess about in your bogs and not earn enough to put tobacco in my pipe?" Aaronsen cried angrily. "If you can find a buyer for me, I'll sell!"—"Buyer?" Aksel said. "The soil is fairly good if you cultivate it; with the area that you have a man could earn his keep."—"But don't you hear me saying that I refuse to mess about in it!" Aaronsen cried again into the gale. "I can do better than that!" Aksel thought he might be able to find a buyer, but Aaronsen derided such an idea with hilarity: "There isn't a single person here in the backland who can buy me out."—"Not here in the backland perhaps. But there may be others."—"Here there's nothing but filth and poverty," Aaronsen went on furiously. "Be that as it may. But Isak Sellanrå could buy you out any day," Aksel said, offended. "I don't believe it," Aaronsen said. "I don't care what you believe," Aksel said, turning to go. Aaronsen shouted after him, "Wait a minute. Uh, so you think Isak could take Storborg off my hands, do you?"—"Yes," Aksel replied, "even if there were five such Storborgs, as far as money and capital are concerned!"

Aaronsen had made a detour around the Sellanrå farm going up, reluctant to show himself; on the way home he dropped in and talked with Isak. "No," Isak said, shaking his head, "that's something I haven't thought about, nor do I understand it."

But when Eleseus came home to Sellanrå at Christmas, Isak was no longer so unwilling. True enough, he had never heard anything so absurd: just imagine, to buy Storborg! That whim had certainly not come from him; but if Eleseus thought that the store was something for him, they would think about it.

Eleseus himself was halfway between, not at all eager, but not indifferent either. If he settled down here at home, it was in a way all over with him: the backland was not the town. This fall, when the local folks were summoned to a big hearing in town, he had avoided showing himself; he didn't care to meet these fellow parishioners who belonged to another world. Was he now going to return to that world himself?

His mother thought they should buy, as did Sivert; they converged on Eleseus, and one day all three of them drove down to Storborg to take a look at the splendor.

But at the prospect of getting rid of the place, Aaronsen became a different man: he didn't need to sell! If he went away, the farm could just sit there; it was an "absolutely safe" farm, a splendid farm, he would certainly be able to sell it. "You won't give me what I want for it," Aaronsen said. They visited the rooms, the cow barn, the warehouses, and took a look at what remained of the miserable merchandise: a few harmonicas, watch chains, packets of flowery stationery, hanging lamps with prisms, all of it unsalable articles among the settlers in the area. There was also some cotton material and a few boxes of nails.

Elseus put on airs and looked at everything with a professional eye. "I have no use for that sort of merchandise," he said. "Well, just leave it alone," Aaronsen replied. "But I'll offer you fifteen hundred kroner for the place as it is, including the merchandise, the animals and everything," Elseus said. Oh, he was so reckless, his offer was only a kind of coquettishness, he wanted to show off.

They drove home again. The deal didn't come off. Elseus had made Aaronsen a ridiculous offer and offended him. "I won't even deign to listen to you, Elseus," Aaronsen said, speaking familiarly; just think, that city-educated fop presumed to teach Aaronsen, the businessman, about merchandise! "As far as I know we're not on intimate terms," Elseus said, equally offended. It looked as though they would be enemies for life.

But why was Aaronsen from the very first moment so arrogant, acting as if he wasn't obliged to sell? There was a reason for it, namely, that Aaronsen once more harbored a sort of hope.

There had been a meeting in the village to discuss the situation that had arisen from Geissler's refusal to sell his mountain. It was not only the backland that suffered on account of this, the whole district was dying. Why couldn't people live just as well, or just as poorly, now as before the experimental operation in the copper mountain? Well, people just couldn't do that. They had become accustomed to white porridge and white bread, store-bought fabric for clothes, high wages, extravagance; they had become used to having a lot of money, that was it. And now the money was gone—it had slipped away like a shoal of herring moving out to sea. Oh Lord, what distress, and what was to be done?

There was no doubt that the former sheriff, Geissler, wanted to get even with the parish because it had helped the district governor dismiss him; nor was there any doubt that the parish had underestimated this man. He was nobody's fool. By the most simple means, just by asking a shameless quarter of a million for a mountain, he had managed to stop the entire development of the community. Quite a power to reckon with, wasn't he? Aksel Strøm at Måneland could add his bit here, he was the last to have seen Geissler. Brede's girl, Barbro, had been tried in town and came home acquitted, and Geissler had been present during the whole interrogation. And anyone who thought of Geissler as a poor devil in the doldrums had only to look at the expensive machines he had presented to Aksel as a gift.

This man, then, had the fate of the whole district in his hands, they would have to come to terms with him. In a pinch, what would Geissler be willing to accept for his mountain? That had to be cleared up. The Swedes had offered him twenty-five thousand, which Geissler had rejected. But what if the parish, the municipality, contributed the rest simply to bring about a deal? If the sum wasn't too unreasonable, it would pay off. Both the trader down by the coast and Aaronsen at Storborg would contribute privately and in secret; an outlay now would be recovered in the long run.

The upshot was that two men were entrusted with going to Geissler to have a talk with him. They were expected back shortly.

That was why Aaronsen again harbored a trace of hope in his heart and thought he could be disdainful of anyone who wanted to buy Storborg. He wouldn't remain disdainful for very long.

About a week later the delegation returned with a flat refusal. The undertaking had been wrong from the very beginning, in that one of the two delegates was no one other than Brede Olsen— well, because he had heaps of time. To be sure, the men had found Geissler, but he had only shaken his head and laughed. "Go back home!" he had said. But Geissler had paid their return journey.

And now, was the district to go to rack and ruin?

After Aaronsen had fumed for a while, feeling more and more at a loss about what to do, he went straight up to Sellanrå one day and closed the deal. He did, indeed! Elseus had his way: he got the farm, with its buildings, animals and merchandise, for fifteen hundred kroner. True enough, when he took possession it became apparent that Aaronsen's wife had gotten her hands on most of the cotton fabrics; but a man like Elseus didn't bother with such trifles. "We mustn't be petty," he said.

But all in all Elseus was by no means delighted: his life was now sealed, he would be buried in the wilds! He had to scale back his great plans: he was no longer a clerk, would never become sheriff, not even be a city dweller. Vis-à-vis his father and those at home he was rather proud of having gotten Storborg for the exact price he had offered; there they could see, he knew what was what! But this small triumph didn't do much good. He had also the satisfaction of being able to take over Andresen, the assistant, who thus came with the deal in a way; Aaronsen had no use for his assistant anymore, not until he got himself a new store. Elseus was strangely tickled when Andresen came and asked to be allowed to stay: for the first time in his life, Elseus was master and boss. "You can stay!" he said. "Anyway, I'll need an assistant on the place when I go on business trips, to open up connections in Trondhjem and Bergen," he said.

And Andresen was anything but a poor assistant, that he showed right away; he worked hard and did a good job looking after things when the boss, Elseus, was away. It was only when he first came upcountry that he had shown pretensions to grandeur and gentility, and for that his master, Aaronsen, was to blame. It was different now. In spring, as soon as the bogs had thawed to some depth, Sivert Sellanrå came down to Storborg and began digging ditches for his brother, and lo, there was Andresen, too, going out into the bogs to dig ditches—whatever he did it for, since he was not obliged to; he simply was that kind of man. The ground was so little thawed that they didn't get deep enough by far, but did half a job for the time being, which was already something. To drain the bogs at Storborg and do farming was the idea of good old Isak; that small country store was only to be something extra, saving the upcountry folks from going all the way to the village if they needed a reel of sewing thread.

So there they were, Sivert and Andresen, digging ditches, taking a breather now and then for a playful chat. In some way or other, Andresen had got hold of a gold twenty-kroner piece, and Sivert had a yen for this bright coin; but Andresen refused to part with it

and hid it in his box wrapped in a bit of tissue paper. Sivert suggested they wrestle for the gold coin, but that Andresen found too risky; Sivert offered to give twenty kroner in bills and in addition to drain the entire bog alone if he got the piece. But then Andresen felt offended and said, "Ah, so you could tell your folks back home that I'm no good at tackling the bog!" At long last they agreed on twenty-five kroner in paper money for the gold coin, and Sivert raced home to Sellanrå at night and got the bills from his father.

A whim of youth, life's beautiful youth! A sleepless night, half a dozen miles going and ditto coming, and back to work again the next day—that was nothing for the strong young man; and the gold coin was very pretty. True, Andresen felt like making a little fun of him for this odd bit of business, but for that Sivert had a good remedy: all he had to do was to hint a word about Leopoldine, saying, "Oh, by the way, Leopoldine asked me to say hello!" and Andresen stopped immediately and turned red.

They were jolly days for them both, standing there in the bog and squabbling for fun, and working and squabbling once again. Elseus would come and help them now and then, but he tired easily and was neither physically strong nor strong-minded; but he was kindness itself. "There's Oline," Sivert, that rascal, would say, "now you have to go in and sell her half a pound of coffee again!" And Elseus was glad to do so—to go in and sell Oline some trifle or other. Then he was spared turning over clods of boggy soil for a while.

Oline, poor thing, did need a few coffee beans occasionally, whether she was given the pennies to pay for them by Aksel once in a while or got her hands on them for a small goat cheese. Oline was no longer what she had been, her job at Måneland was really too hard for the old woman and had told severely on her. Not that she acknowledged getting old or decrepit—ho, she would have gotten into a state if she were dismissed. She was tough and irre-pressible, did her job and found time to walk over to the neighbors and get herself a whopping good chat, which she missed at home. Aksel was no talker.

She was dissatisfied with the trial, disappointed by the outcome. Acquittal all along the line! That Brede's girl, Barbro, should go free when Inger Sellanrå got eight years went over Oline's head; she felt a very unchristian indignation at their having been kind to someone else. "But," she said, nodding her head, "the Almighty has yet to speak his mind!" thereby maybe predicting a possible divine sentence to come. Naturally, Oline was incapable of keeping quiet about her dissatisfaction with the trial, especially when she fell out with her master about something or other; then she would begin to speak with studied sarcasm in her mealy-mouthed way: "Well, I don't know anymore what the law is concerning the sins of Sodom, but I go by God's own words, simple soul that I am."

Oh, Aksel was sick and tired of his housekeeper and wished she would get lost. With spring coming round again, he would have to do the spring planting all by himself; then came the haying and he would be quite helpless. Those were his prospects. His brother's wife at Bredablik had written home to Helgeland for him, trying to find a decent woman to help him out, but so far nothing had come of it. And in any case, he would then have to pay for her passage.

No, it was a mean, low-down trick on the part of Barbro to get rid of the baby and then clear out herself! For two winters and a summer he had been obliged to manage with Oline, with no likely end in sight. Did Barbro, that wretch, take it to heart? He had talked a few words with her down in the village one day last winter, but not one tear had trickled down from her eyes and frozen on her cheek. "What have you done with the rings I gave you?" he asked. "The rings?" she said. "Yes, the rings!"—"I haven't got them anymore."—"Hm, you haven't got them anymore."—"After all, it was over between us," she said, "so I couldn't keep wearing the rings. Nobody does that when it's all over."—"I just want to know what you've done with them."—"Would you have taken them back?" she asked. "I didn't like to think that you would be that common." After thinking it over for a moment, Aksel said, "I could've made it up to you. You wouldn't have done it for nothing."

But no, Barbro had parted with the rings, and never so much as gave him the chance of obtaining a gold ring and a silver ring at a reasonable price.

For all that, Barbro was neither coarse nor ill-mannered, no, she was not. She was wearing a long apron with straps and ruffles, and at her neck a white ribbon peeped out—very attractive. It was said that she had already found a sweetheart in the village, but that may have been nothing but gossip; in any case, the sheriff's wife kept a sharp watch on her and saw to it that she didn't go to a single Christmas dance this year.

Yes, the sheriff's wife did, indeed, watch her very closely: as Aksel was standing in the road talking to his former servant about a pair of rings, the lady suddenly appeared right between them and said, "Barbro, weren't you going to the store for me?" Barbro went off. The lady turned to Aksel and said, "You wouldn't have a chunk of meat or other to sell me, would you?"—"Hm," Aksel replied, bowing.

It was the sheriff's wife and no one else, of course, who had given him such fulsome praise sometime last fall, telling him he was an excellent fellow, one of the most excellent, and one good turn deserved another. Aksel was familiar with how folks in the old days conducted themselves toward big shots, the authorities, and actually he had right away vaguely thought of a carcass, a one-year-old bullock he could sacrifice. But the days went by and one month after another, and he spared the bullock. It didn't look as though something bad would happen if he hung on to it either; in any case, he would be that much poorer if he gave it away, and it was a thumping big bullock.

"Hm. How do you do!" No, Aksel said, shaking his head, he had no animal for slaughter. It was as though the sheriff's wife was guessing at his innermost thoughts. "I've heard that you have a bullock," she said. "Yes, that's so," Aksel replied. "Are you going to rear it?"—"Yes, I'm going to rear him."—"I see," said the sheriff's wife, "and you don't have a ram?"—"No, not now. The fact is, I haven't raised more animals than I can keep."—"Well, that was all." The lady nodded and left.



Aksel drove on homeward, but he continued to be preoccupied by this conversation, afraid that maybe he had gone about it the wrong way. That sheriff's wife had been an important witness once, for and against him, but an important witness. It had caused him some suffering, but he had been set free from a difficult and ominous affair involving a dead child found in his wood lot. Perhaps he had better sacrifice a ram, after all.

Strange as it may sound, this thought had a remote connection with Barbro: if he brought her mistress a ram, he was bound to make a certain impression on Barbro, wasn't he?

But again the days went by and nothing bad happened because the days went by. When he again drove down to the village he didn't take a ram with him, no, he didn't; but at the last moment he took along a lamb. It was a big lamb, though, no paltry animal, and when he brought it he said, "The rams, you know, have such tough meat, and I wanted to give you something good." But the sheriff's wife wouldn't hear of taking it as a gift. "Tell me how much you want per pound," she said. No thanks, the plain-spoken lady did not accept gifts from people! The upshot was that Aksel was well paid for his lamb.

He didn't meet Barbro. Oh, the sheriff's wife had probably seen him coming and gotten her out of the way. And good riddance. Barbro had cheated him out of his hired help for one year and a half!

## IX

In the spring something very unexpected and very important happened: work was resumed in the copper mines, Geissler had sold his mountain. Had the incredible occurred? Oh, Geissler was an unfathomable gentleman; he could act or not act, shake his head for no or nod for yes. He could make a whole parish smile again.

Then he must have been troubled by his conscience—he would no longer punish the district where he had once been sheriff with home-grown porridge meal and lack of money, was that it? Or had he gotten his quarter million? But perhaps the truth was that Geissler himself had begun to need money and had to sell the mountain for what he could get? Twenty-five or fifty thousand is also money. Incidentally, rumor had it that his eldest son had concluded the deal on his father's behalf.

In any case, operation was resumed, the same engineer returned with a considerable crew and the same work began once more. The same work, sure, but in a completely different way than before, the wrong way.

Everything might seem to be in order: the Swedes had come with men and dynamite and money, so what could be wrong? Even Aaronsen appeared again, Aaronsen the trader, who was dead set on buying back Storborg. “No,” Elseus said, “I’m not selling.”—“I bet you’ll sell if you’re offered enough!”—“No.”

No, Elseus wasn’t going to sell Storborg. The fact was that it no longer appeared to him such a wretched thing to be a shopkeeper upcountry; he had a fine veranda with colored windowpanes and an assistant to do the work for him, while he himself went traveling. Oh, to be traveling first class, with elegant people! Some day, perhaps, he might be able to go as far as America! He had often thought of that. But even these business trips to the towns down south in order to establish connections were something he could live on for a long while every time. Not that he let himself go, traveled by his own steamship and messed around with orgies. Just imagine, Elseus and orgies! He was really odd: he no longer cared about girls, he had given up on them, lost interest. But being the margrave’s son, he traveled first class, of course, and bought lots of merchandise. He returned from his jaunts a little more elegant and grand each time; most recently he came back with galoshes on his feet. “Are you wearing two pairs of shoes?” they asked him. “Yes, I have cold feet,” Elseus said. And they felt sorry for his cold feet.

Happy days, living like a lord, a life of ease and idleness! No, he refused to sell Storborg. Was he supposed to go back to the little town and stand behind the counter in that small general store again and not have an assistant under him? Moreover, he intended from now on to do business on a grand scale at Storborg. The Swedes had come back and would flood the area with money, he would be a fool if he sold. Aaronsen had to go away with a refusal every time, more and more appalled at his foolishness in having left the wild.

Oh, but Aaronsen could have kept his self-torture within reasonable limits and, similarly, Elseus could have moderated his great expectations; but most of all, the settlers and the villagers should have been less hopeful and not gone around smiling and rubbing their hands like angels assured of their bliss—something to which the settlers and the villagers should have given a wide berth, for now their disappointment would be enormous. Who would believe it? The mining was resumed, to be sure, but at the opposite end of the mountain, twelve miles away, at the south end of Geissler’s mountain, well into another parish that was of no concern to them. From there on the work was slowly to eat its way north to the first copper mountain, Isak’s mountain, and be a blessing for the settlement and the village. It would probably take many years at best, generations.

The news came like a huge dynamite blast, with its stunning, deafening effect. The parish plunged into grief. Some blamed Geissler—that damn Geissler had again played a trick on them—others went into a huddle and sent out a new deputation of entrusted men, this time to the mining company, to the engineer. That led to nothing: the engineer explained that he had to start work on the south side because it was near the sea; no aerial cable was needed, indeed, next to no transportation. No, the work had to begin on the south side. So much for that.

Then Aaronsen made his way over to the new work site, the new El Dorado, without delay. He even wanted to take Andresen, the assistant, with him. “Why stay around here, in the wilderness?” he said. “You’d better come with me!” But Andresen wouldn’t leave the settlement; it was incomprehensible, as if he were bound to the place by something—he seemed to be happy there, had taken root. It must be Andresen who had changed, the settlement had not. There, people and circumstances remained exactly as before: the mining industry had been diverted from the region, but no settler had lost his head over it; they had their farming, their crops and their animals. They didn’t have much money, true, but they had all the necessities of life, absolutely all. Not even Elseus was driven to despair when the flood of money passed him by; the worst of it was that in his initial elation he had purchased a lot of unsalable merchandise. Well, it would have to remain where it was for the time being, embellishing the store and reflecting credit on its owner.

The settlers in the wild didn’t lose their heads. They didn’t find the air to be unhealthy for them, had a large enough public for their new clothes and didn’t miss diamonds. Wine they knew from the wedding in Cana. The settlers didn’t make themselves suffer on account of goodies they hadn’t got: art, newspapers, luxuries, politics were worth exactly as much as people were willing to pay for them, no more; the growth of the soil, on the other hand, had to be procured at any cost. It was the origin of all things, the only source. The settlers’ lives sad and empty? Ho, that least of all! They had their higher powers, their dreams, their loves, their wealth of superstition. Walking up along the river one evening, Sivert suddenly stops: down on the water sit two wild ducks, male and female. They have spotted him, they have seen a human being and become apprehensive; one of them says something, a brief sound, a melody of three notes, which the other answers correspondingly. The same moment they take off, spin like two little wheels a stone’s throw upriver and settle once more. Then one of them says something again and the other answers; it is the same language as the first

time, but with a touch of blissfulness for being saved: *it is pitched two octaves higher!* Sivert stands there watching the birds, seeing past them far into a dream. A sound had sailed through him, a sweetness, leaving him with a fine, thin remembrance of something wild and beautiful, something previously experienced but effaced. He walks home in silence, doesn't talk about it, doesn't chatter about it; it was nothing like mundane speech. It was Sivert Sellanrå, young and ordinary, who experienced this when he walked out one evening.

It was not his only adventure, he had others. He even had the adventure of Jensine leaving Sellanrå. That produced much confusion in Sivert's emotional life.

Yes, that is what it came to: it was her own decision. Well, Jensine wasn't just anybody, no one could say that. Sivert had once offered to drive her back home again; on that occasion she had unfortunately cried. Later she regretted her tears and showed that she did: she gave notice. All right, fair and square behavior.

Nothing could have suited Inger Sellanrå better than her leaving; Inger had begun to be dissatisfied with her hired help. Strangely enough, though she didn't find fault with her, she seemed to regard her with distaste, to just barely tolerate her about the place. It was no doubt related to Inger's state of mind: she had been heavyhearted and religious all winter and couldn't get over it. "You want to leave? All right," Inger said. It was a blessing, a fulfillment of mighty prayers. There would still be two grown-up women in the house, so what was Jensine, marriageable and bursting with health, doing here? Inger looked with displeasure at this marriage-ability of hers, thinking something like this, maybe: Just the way I was once!

Her great piety didn't wear off. She was so little inclined toward vice—she had tasted, well, nibbled at it, but had no intention of carrying on like that through her old age, not by any means. Inger dismissed the thought with horror. The mining was over and all the workers were gone—heavens, nothing could be better! Virtue was not only bearable, it was necessary, a necessary good, a mercy.

But the world had gone crazy. Look, here was Leopoldine, little Leopoldine, a seed, a little child, walking about brimful of health and sin; if someone put an arm around her she would fall over, pfui! She had begun to get pimples in her face, a sign in itself of a wildness in the blood—oh, her mother remembered, that was the beginning of the wildness in the blood. The mother didn't condemn her daughter for these pimples in her face, but she wanted an end to them, Leopoldine must stop having them. And what was this assistant, Andresen, coming up to Sellanrå for on Sundays, chatting about farming with Isak? Did the two men imagine that little Leopoldine was unaware of what was going on? Oh, youth was mad enough in the old days, too, thirty or forty years ago, but now it was worse.

"However that may be," Isak said when they talked about this. "But now spring is here and Jensine gone, and who is to do the summer work?"—"Leopoldine and I will do the raking," Inger said. "Yes, I'd rather rake day and night!" she said, steamed up and on the verge of tears. Isak didn't understand this violent outburst, but he had his own opinions, so he went over to the edge of the woods with pickaxe and pry and set to work on a stone. No, indeed, Isak had no idea why Jensine, the hired girl, had left, she was a capable girl. Altogether, he understood only the most simple things: work, lawful and natural doings. He had a powerful chest, well fleshed out, no one could be less astral; he ate his food like a man and it did him good, hence he was seldom thrown off balance.

Well, here was this stone. There were many more stones, but here was one to begin with. Isak sees a day coming when he will have to build a little cottage, a little home for himself and Inger; he sees his chance to clear the site a bit while Sivert is down at Storborg, otherwise it will be necessary to give Sivert an explanation, and that he wants to avoid. A day will come, naturally, when Sivert will need all the housing for himself, and so his parents must have their own place. There was really no end to building at Sellanrå; the big hayloft above the stone cow barn was still to be built as well. But the beams and boards were all there.

Well, now, here was this stone. It didn't look very large above-ground, but it wouldn't budge, so it had to be huge all the same. Isak dug around it and tried with the pry—it didn't budge. He dug more and tried again, but no. Then Isak had to go home and fetch a spade to clear away the earth; he dug again and tried—no. Well, quite a big shot! Isak doubtless thought, forbearingly. He now dug away for quite a while, but the stone was growing wider and wider the further down he went, and he couldn't get a proper purchase on it. What a nuisance it would be if he was forced to blast it. The strokes on the drill would be heard, alerting everyone in the house. He dug on, then went to fetch a lever and gave it a try—no. He dug again. Isak may have begun to feel that the stone was teasing him; he knitted his brows and gave it a look that said he'd merely come to check on the stones a bit, but found this stone to be particularly stupid. He grew critical—the stone was so round and idiotic, you couldn't get a grip on it, he almost thought it looked deformed. Blast it? Spend money on gunpowder for it, out of the question. Should he give up on it then, betraying some sort of fear that the stone would gain the upper hand?

He dug. He was getting awfully tired, he sure was, but where was the fear? Finally he got a hold with the point of the lever and tried it—the stone didn't budge. Technically, you couldn't find fault with his grip, but it didn't work. What was this, hadn't he broken loose stones before? Had he grown old? Funny, heh-heh. Ridiculous. True enough, he had recently noticed signs of diminishing strength—that is, he hadn't noticed it or bothered with it, it was a mere fancy. And he goes at the stone again, fully determined to get it out.

Oh, it was certainly no trifle when Isak bore down on a lever with all his weight. There he lies, hoisting and hoisting, larger than life, cyclopean, with a torso that seemed to extend to his knees. There was a certain sense of pomp and circumstance about him, his equator was astounding.

But the stone didn't budge.

It couldn't be helped, he had to dig some more. Blast the stone? Shut up! No, he had to dig some more. He was growing extremely eager, the stone just had to come up! You couldn't say there was anything perverse in this on Isak's part, it was his old love as a tiller of the soil, but wholly without tenderness. It looked quite ridiculous: first, he kind of bore down on the stone from all directions before pouncing on it, then he dug around its sides, groping it and scooping up dirt with his bare hands, yes, he did. But there was nothing of a caress in this. He was hot, but hot with zealotry.

What if he tried the lever again? He thrust it down where he had the best hope—no. How could a stone show such a strange defiance and obstinacy! But it seemed to work, Isak tried again, hopeful now. The tiller of the soil sensed that the stone was no longer invincible. Then the lever slipped, throwing Isak to the ground. "Damn it!" he said. It just escaped him. His cap had been given a push as he fell and hung sideways, making him look like a brigand, Spanish. He gave a spit.

Inger comes over. "Now you must come and get something to eat, Isak," she says, being perfectly nice and kindly. "Yes," he replies, but he doesn't want her to come any closer and is unwilling to talk. Oh, that Inger! She didn't understand anything, she came closer. "What have you thought up now?" she asks, trying to soften him by hinting that he thinks up something grand almost every day. But Isak is so gruff, so terribly gruff, and replies, "Oh, I don't know." And Inger, for her part, is so dumb—oh, dear, she asks questions and goes on talking to him and doesn't leave. "As you can see," he says, "I want to take out this stone!"—"Oh, you want to take him out?"—"Yes."—"I can't help you, can I?" she asks. Isak shakes his head. But anyway, it was handsome of Inger to offer her help, and he could no longer fight her off. "If you can wait a bit," he said, running home for a sledgehammer and a flatter.

If he could roughen up the stone a bit by knocking off a chip in the right spot, the lever would have a better grip. Inger holds the flatter and Isak strikes. Strikes and strikes—yes, it works, a chip breaks off. "Well, thanks for your help," Isak says. "And don't bother about food for the time being, I want to get this stone out."

But Inger does not leave. And, in fact, Isak is pleased to have her watching him at work, it is something he has liked ever since their youthful days. And lo, he gets an excellent hold for the lever and lifts—the stone moves! "He's moving!" Inger says. "Are you joking?" Isak asks. "Am I joking? He's moving!"

He had gotten this far; it rose, just barely; hang it, he'd won the stone over to the cause and they began to cooperate. Isak hoists and heaves with the lever and the stone moves, but no more. He keeps at it a while longer, it comes to nothing. All at once he understands it's not simply a question of body weight on his part; the fact is that he no longer has his old strength, his body has lost its pliancy. Body weight? It was easy enough to weigh on and break the heavy pole. He had simply become weaker, or so it seemed. This fills the patient man with bitterness; if only Inger hadn't witnessed it, at least!

Suddenly he drops the lever and grabs the sledgehammer. Seized with anger, he feels like resorting to violence. His cap still sits at a rakish angle and makes him look like a brigand, and now he walks around the stone, huge and threatening, to sort of put himself in the proper light in relation to it—ho, it looks as though he means to leave this stone a ruin of what it used to be. Why shouldn't he? To crush a stone that fills you with mortal hatred is a mere formality. And what if the stone resisted, if it didn't let itself be crushed? It would find out which of them survived the battle!

But then Inger says, again rather timorously, since she no doubt understands what is brewing in the man: "What if both of us weigh down on the log?" By "log" she meant the lever. "No!" Isak yells furiously. But after a moment's reflection he says, "All right—since you're still here, but I don't see why you don't go back home. Let's try."

They manage to get the stone up on edge. They are succeeding. "Phew!" Isak says.

But now something unexpected appears before their eyes. The underside of the stone is a flat surface, mighty large, nicely cut, even, smooth as a floor. The stone is only one half of a stone, the other half must be somewhere near. Isak was familiar with the fact that the two halves of the same stone could have different beds in the ground, probably due to deep frost, which, operating through long periods of time, had moved them away from one another. But he is surprised and delighted at the find, it's a useful stone of the best sort, a door slab. A good-sized sum of money wouldn't even get close to filling the heart of this dweller in the wilds with so much contentment. "A fine door slab!" he says proudly. Inger exclaims in good faith, "I just don't see how you could know!"—"Hm!" Isak said, "did you think I was digging here for nothing?"

They walk home together, with Isak wangling an undeserved admiration, which doesn't taste very different from a deserved one. He holds forth about having been on the lookout for a proper door slab all along, and now he has found it. From now on there would be nothing at all suspicious about his work on the building lot; he could poke around as much as he wanted on the pretext of looking for the other half of the door slab. When Sivert came home, he even got him to help.

But if the situation was such that he could no longer go out by himself and work a stone out of the ground, then much had changed; it didn't bode well, and the building lot couldn't wait. Old age had caught up with Isak, he was beginning to get ripe for a pensioner's cottage. The triumph he had falsely obtained when he found the door slab crumbled as the days went by, it was bogus and fleeting. Isak began to walk with a stoop.

Hadn't he at one time in his life become alert and wide-awake the moment someone said the words "stone" or "trench" to him? It was no time at all since then, just a few years. And then anyone who looked askance at a dried-out bog had better watch out for him. Now he was slowly beginning to take all such things more calmly, good Lord, yes! Nothing was as before, the whole area had changed: that wide telegraph trail through the woods hadn't been there before, the mountains up at the lake hadn't been blasted

before. And the people? Did they say "Peace!" when they came and "Rest in peace!" when they left? They just nodded, and barely that.

But, of course, there was no Sellanrå either before, only a turf hut; and now? Nor was there a margrave before.

Yes, but what was the margrave now! Merely a sad and withered mortal. What was the use of eating and having a healthy set of guts if it no longer gave you strength? It was Sivert who had the strength now, and thank God that he did, but imagine if Isak himself had had it too! What sense did it make that the machinery was beginning to slow down? He had worked like a man, his back had borne up under loads befitting a beast of burden; hereafter he would show his staying power by resting his back seated on a bench.

Isak is dissatisfied, Isak is heavyhearted.

An old sou'wester lies rotting on the ground. It was brought there, to the edge of the woods, by the storm, or perhaps by the boys when they were small. There it lies year after year, rotting more and more, but once it was a new sou'wester, yellow all over. Isak remembers the day he came home with it from the store and Inger said it was a handsome sou'wester. A couple of years later he went to the painter in the village and had the sou'wester blackened to a gloss and its brim painted green. When he came home that time, Inger thought it was more handsome than ever. Inger always thought everything was nice—oh, it was a good time, with him chopping cordwood and Inger looking on, it was his best time. And when March and April came, he and Inger would be mad about each other, just like the birds and beasts in the woods, and when May came around he would sow the grain and plant the potatoes and be happy around the clock. Life was work and sleep, love and dreams; he was like their first grown bull, a real wonder, big and glossy like a king when it appeared. But nowadays there is no such May anymore. No such thing.

Isak was very depressed for a few days. They were dark days. He had neither the desire nor the strength to start work on the hayloft, leaving it for Sivert to do some day; the important thing now was the pensioner's cottage. In the long run he couldn't hide from Sivert that what he was doing there at the edge of the woods was to clear a building lot, and one day he told him. "Here is a good stone if we should do any building," he said. "And there is another good one," he said. Sivert didn't bat an eye but replied, "Real foundation stones!"—"Well, what do you think?" the father says. "We've been rummaging about for a second door slab so long now that we might have a so-so building lot here. But I don't know."—"I suppose you could find a worse lot than this one," Sivert replies, giving the place the once-over. "You think so? Because it would be nice to have a little cottage here, where we could put up folks if anyone should come."—"Yes."—"There would have to be a living room and a bedroom, I suppose? You saw how it was when the Swedish gentlemen came here the last time, and we still haven't got a new place for them. But what do you think: there would have to be a kitchen, too, a small one, in case they should like to do some cooking, wouldn't there?"—"Of course; they can't be without a small kitchen, otherwise, you know, they will make a laughingstock of us," Sivert said. "You think so?"

The father fell silent. But Sivert had a wonderful turn for understanding things, quickly catching on what was needed in a place for Swedish gentlemen. He never even asked a question but said, "If I were you, I'd put up a bit of a shed by the north wall. A shed would be good to have if they should want to hang up their wet clothes to dry." The father jumps at it: "You're saying something!"

Then they are silent, working at their stones. After a while the father says, "Elseus hasn't come home yet, has he?" Sivert answers evasively, "He'll be coming soon now."

There was this problem with Elseus, he was so intent on being away, on traveling. Couldn't he write for goods, instead of being on the spot to buy them? He got them much cheaper, to be sure, but how much did his travels cost? He had such a strange way of thinking. And what did he want with more cotton fabrics, sundry silk ribbons for christening caps, black and white straw hats and long tobacco pipes? Not a soul in the wilds bought such things, and the village customers came up to Storborg only every time they were broke. Elseus was capable enough in his way—oh, you should see him writing on paper or doing sums on the chalkboard! "I wish I had your head!" folks would tell him. All this was true enough, but he was too generous with credit. The villagers never paid what they owed, and even poor devils like Brede Olsen had come to Storborg this winter and bought cotton material, coffee, syrup and kerosine on credit.

Isak has already laid out a great deal of money for Elseus, his business and his travels; he doesn't have very much left of the wealth from the copper mountain. And what next? "How is Elseus doing, you think?" Isak suddenly asks. "Doing?" Sivert asks in turn, to gain time. "It doesn't look good."—"He himself feels quite confident."—"Oh, have you spoken to him about it?"—"No, Andresen told me." The father thinks it over, shaking his head: "No, it won't work!" he says. "But I'm sorry for Elseus."

The father is becoming more and more somber, he wasn't too cheerful to begin with.

Then Sivert comes out with a piece of news: "Some more people are coming into the area now."—"How is that?"—"Two more settlers. They have bought land near us." Isak stands still with the pry in his hand: that was big news, a good piece of news, one of the best. "Then there will be ten of us in the backland," he says. Isak learns where exactly the new men have bought, having the geography of the whole area in his head. Nodding, he says, "They couldn't have done better; the forest has plenty of firewood, as well as a bit of timber. The ground slopes southeast."

With new ones coming, nothing could defeat the settlers. The mining had come to an end, but so much the better for the farmers; it wasn't true that the land was dead, quite the contrary. It was beginning to teem with life—two new men, four more hands, elds and meadows and homes. Oh, those green wide-open spaces in the forest, a hut and a spring, children and animals! Grain swaying on the moors where horsetail grew before, bluebells nodding on the hills, babies' slippers blazing with golden sunlight near the houses. And people are going about their lives, talking and thinking, at one with heaven and earth. Here stands the first man in the wilds. He came walking knee-deep in mud and heather, found a hillside and settled there. Others followed, treading a path in the empty common; still others came, the path became a road where they now drove with carts. Isak must be contented, feel a thrill of pride. He was the founder of the settlement, he is the margrave. "Well, we can't mess around with this building lot all the time if we are to put up a hayloft this year," he said. His saying this appeared to indicate a sudden cheerful mood, a renewed zest for life.

## X

A woman walks up through the common. A steady summer rain is falling and she is getting wet, but she doesn't care; she has something else to think about, she is anxious—it is Barbro and no one else, Brede's Barbro. Of course she is anxious: she doesn't know how her adventure will end, but she has left the sheriff's and put the village behind her. That's the way it is.

She gives a wide berth to all the homesteads on the way up, for she wants to avoid people; everyone would understand where she is going since she carries a bundle of clothing on her back. Well, she is going to Måneland and wants to stay there again.

She has been in service at the sheriff's for ten months, which is not a short time reckoned in days and nights; it is an eternity reckoned in coercion and longings. At the beginning it went really well; Mrs. Heyerdahl was so solicitous about her, giving her aprons and dressing her up—it was a pleasure to be sent on an errand to the store in such fine clothes. Having lived in the village as a child, Barbro knew everyone from the days when she had played there, gone to school and kissed the boys, and joined in all kinds of games with pebbles and shells. It went well for a couple of months. But then Mrs. Heyerdahl became even more solicitous, and when the Christmas festivities began, she became very strict. And what could come of that except that it destroyed their good relationship! Barbro wouldn't have endured it if she hadn't had certain hours of the night to herself: from two to six in the morning she was fairly safe, and she managed to find many a stolen pleasure during those hours. So what sort of woman was the cook, who didn't report her? An average woman, as the world goes: the cook went out without permission herself. They took turns standing watch.

A long time passed before they were found out. Barbro was by no means so wanton that it showed in her face; it was impossible to impute any kind of depravity to her person. Depravity? She offered all the resistance that was expected. When the boys invited her to a Christmas dance, she said no once, even twice, but the third time she replied, "I'll try to come from two to six." That is the way a decent woman answers: she doesn't make herself out to be worse than she is and doesn't preen herself on her audacity. She was a servant girl, working all day long and knowing no other amusement than playing around. That was all she desired. The sheriff's wife lectured her and lent her books—what a fool! After all, Barbro had lived in Bergen and read the papers and been to the theater! She was anything but a simple soul from the wilderness.

But Mrs. Heyerdahl must have become suspicious; one morning at three o'clock she stands before the door to the maids' room, calling, "Barbro!"—"Yes," answers the cook. "Isn't Barbro there? Open the door!" The cook opens the door and gives the necessary explanation, namely, that Barbro had to run home for a moment. "Home for a moment? It's three o'clock, in the middle of the night!" the lady says, and expatiates on that. At the crack of dawn a regular hearing took place, Brede was sent for and Mrs. Heyerdahl asked, "Was Barbro at home with you at three o'clock last night?" Brede is unprepared, but answers, "Yes. At three o'clock? Last night? Oh, yes. We stayed up late, there was something we had to talk over," Barbro's father replies. Mrs. Heyerdahl announces solemnly, "Barbro will not be going out at night anymore!"—"All right," Brede answers. "Not as long as she is in this house!"—"Sure. Well, there you can see, Barbro, I told you so!" her father says. "You can go and see your parents in the morning now and then," the lady decides.

But the vigilant Mrs. Heyerdahl hadn't completely gotten rid of her suspicion all the same; after waiting for about a week she made another spot check, around four in the morning. "Barbro!" she called. But this time the cook was out and Barbro at home, the maids' room was a model of innocence. The mistress of the house had to think up something in a hurry: "Did you take in the laundry last night?"—"Yes."—"That's good, a gale is brewing. Good night!"

It was rather wearisome for Mrs. Heyerdahl, of course, to get the sheriff to wake her in the middle of the night and then pad over to the maids' room to see if they were home. Come what may, she wouldn't do it again.

And if luck hadn't failed her, Barbro could doubtless have borne with her mistress and stayed the year out in this way. But a few days ago they had had a falling-out.

It was early one morning in the kitchen. To begin with, Barbro had had a slight disagreement with the cook, well, not so slight either; they spoke louder and louder, forgetting that their mistress might turn up. The cook had behaved wretchedly and sneaked out the night before out of turns because it was night to Sunday. And what was her excuse? Going to say goodbye to a beloved sister who was leaving for America? Not a bit of it! The cook didn't excuse herself at all, claiming that she had this one night coming. "For shame!" Barbro said. "You don't have an ounce of truth or decency in your body, sneak that you are!"

And there was their mistress, standing in the doorway.<sup>9</sup> Originally, perhaps, she had meant to ask for an explanation of their loud voices, but after answering the servants' good morning, she suddenly fixed her eyes on Barbro, on Barbro's bib, leaning forward to take an even closer look at it. It was getting to be uncanny. Suddenly their mistress lets out a scream and retreats to the door. What on earth is the matter? Barbro must think, looking down at her breast. Oh, good Lord, a louse! Barbro can't help breaking into a little smile, and not being unaccustomed to act under extraordinary circumstances, she flicks the louse away. "On the floor?" screams her mistress. "Are you mad? Pick up the vermin!" Barbro starts looking for it and again acts cleverly: she pretends to have found the louse and tosses it gleefully into the fire.

"Where did you get it from?" Mrs. Heyerdahl asks angrily. "Where I got it?" Barbro replies. "Yes, I want to know where you've been and picked it up. Answer me!" Then Barbro made a sorry mistake by failing to say, "At the general store!" That would have been quite adequate. Well, she didn't quite know where she could have picked up the louse, but she wondered if she hadn't gotten it

from the cook. The cook instantly leaped into the air. "From me? You're good enough yourself at attracting lice!"—"But you were the one who was out last night."

Another mistake, she should never have mentioned it. The cook had no reason to remain silent any longer, and now it all came to light about those ill-fated nights out. The sheriff's wife is in a state of the utmost agitation; she isn't interested in the cook, it all concerns Barbro, the girl whose good behavior she has vouched for. And yet, even now all might have been well if Barbro had bowed her head like a reed, sunk into the ground and sworn loud and clear to mend her ways in the future, but no. In the end Mrs. Heyerdahl had to remind her nursemaid of everything she had done for her, and then, believe it or not, Barbro began to answer back, standing up to her mistress, fool that she was. Or perhaps she was wise, wanting to bring the matter to a head and get away from there? "I rescued you from the clutches of the law," her mistress said. "As far as that goes," Barbro replied, "I couldn't have cared less one way or the other."—"That's the thanks I get!" said Mrs. Heyerdahl. "Shall we hold it in or have it out?" Barbro said. "I could've been convicted, but it wouldn't have been more than a few months in any case. And then I'd be done with it!" For a moment Mrs. Heyerdahl is speechless, yes, for a little while she just stands there opening and closing her mouth. The first word she utters spells dismissal. Barbro simply answers, "Just as you wish."

Barbro spent the days that have passed since then at home with her parents. But she couldn't go on staying there. True, her mother was selling coffee now, and there came a good many people to the house, but Barbro couldn't live on that; she might also have other good reasons for wanting to find a permanent job. And so, today she took a bagful of clothes on her back and set out on a tramp up the common. Now the question was whether Aksel Strøm would accept her. But she had had the banns read last Sunday.

It is raining and the road is muddy, but Barbro tramps on. The day is wearing on, but it is still before St. Olav's Day, it doesn't get dark. Poor Barbro, she doesn't spare herself but does her errand like anyone else; she is on her way to a place where she will start her next struggle. She has never really spared herself, never been lazy, hence her fine and handsome figure. Barbro has a quick mind and often uses it to her own undoing, what else could one expect? She has learned to escape from one tight spot after another, but she has salvaged, along with herself, several good qualities: a child's death is nothing to her, but she can give goodies to a living child. What is more, she has a fine ear for music, strums softly and correctly on her guitar, and sings to her strumming in a husky voice; it is pleasant to listen to and a little sad. No, spared herself? Ho, she has spared herself so little that she threw herself away and perceived no loss doing so. Now and then she cries, breaking her heart over this or that in her life, as will happen; it comes from the ballads she sings—it is the poetry and the amorous sweetness of her, with which she has fooled herself and many others. Had she been able to take along the guitar today, she would have strummed a little for Aksel this evening.

She has arranged it so that she arrives late; all is quiet at Måneland when she enters the yard. Ah, Aksel has already started mowing around the house and has brought in some dried hay! She figures out that Oline, who is old, will be sleeping in the bedroom, so Aksel must be lying out in the hayshed where she herself slept once. She goes up to the familiar door, breathless as a thief, and calls softly, "Aksel."—"What is it?" Aksel replies instantly. "Oh, it's only me," Barbro says and steps in. "But I suppose you can't put me up for the night?" she says.

Aksel looks at her, a bit slow as he sits there in his underclothes looking at her. "Oh, it's you," he says. "Where will you be going?"—"Well, that depends, in the first place, on whether you need some help for the summer," she replies. Aksel thinks it over and asks, "You aren't going to stay any longer where you were, then?"—"No, I've quit my job at the sheriff's."—"I could certainly use some help for the summer," Aksel says. "But what is this supposed to mean: have you taken it into your head to come back?"—"No, just don't bother about me," Barbro says deprecatingly. "I'll continue on tomorrow, I'll go to Sellanrå and over the mountain, where I have a place."—"Oh, they have taken you on?"—"Yes."—"I could certainly use some help for the summer," Aksel repeats.

She is so wet, she has brought clothes in her bag and has to change. "Don't mind about me being here," Aksel says, drawing back toward the door a bit. Barbro takes off her wet clothes as they talk together, with Aksel frequently turning his head in her direction. "Now you must go out for just a bit," Barbro says. "Out?" he replies. The weather wasn't really fit to go out in. He stands there watching her become more and more naked and can't take his eyes off her; Barbro is so thoughtless—she could easily have put on dry things as she got out of the wet ones, but that is not what she did. Her thin shift clings to her body, she unbuttons it at one shoulder and turns away, she is so practiced. At this moment, one of absolute silence on his part, he watches as she uses a mere touch or two to make the shift slide to the floor. It was beautifully done, he thought. And there she stands, utterly unthinking.

Later they lay chatting together. Certainly, he did need some summer help, no mistake. "So I heard," Barbro says. He had once more begun the mowing and haying alone, Barbro no doubt understood how helpless he was. Oh, sure, Barbro understood everything. On the other hand, it was this same Barbro who had run away once and made him stuck for a woman's hand, and he couldn't forget it; and she had taken the rings with her. On top of all the insult, her paper continued to arrive, this Bergen newspaper it seemed he would never get rid of; he had been forced to pay for a whole year afterward. "What a scandalous paper!" Barbro said, agreeing with him all along. But faced with such complaisance, Aksel couldn't be a brute either; he admitted that Barbro might have reason to be annoyed in turn, because he had taken the job of telegraph inspector away from her father. "For that matter, your father can have his telegraph back," he said, "I don't care about it, it's nothing but a waste of time."—"Yes," Barbro said. Aksel thought for a while before he asked straight out, "Now, what do you say, you'll only stay around for the summer?"—"No," Barbro replied, "it'll be as you please."—"You really mean that?"—"Yes. I want exactly what you want. You don't have to distrust me anymore."—"Really."—"No, you don't. And I've had the banns read for us."

Well, that wasn't bad at all. Aksel lay thinking about it for a long time. If it was serious this time and not a shameful deceit again, then he had a woman of his own and was helped for life. "I could've gotten a woman from back home," he said, "and she has written

to say she was willing. But then I would have to pay for her return from America.”—“She is in America, is she?” Barbro asks. “Yes. She went last year, but she isn’t happy there.”—“You shouldn’t bother with her!” Barbro declares. “What would become of me, then?” she asks, showing a bit of emotion. “Yes, and that’s why I haven’t made it definite with her.”

Wanting to be second to none, Barbro confessed that she could have had a boy in Bergen, a driver for a tremendously big brewery, so he was highly trusted. “And most like he’s still grieving over me,” Barbro says, sobbing. “But you know, when folks have had so much together as you and I, Aksel, then I cannot forget it. But you’re free to forget me as much as you like!”—“Who, me?” Aksel answers. “No, as far as that goes, you have no call to cry, for I’ve never forgotten you.”—“You haven’t!”

This admission helps Barbro a lot and she says, “Anyway, just think: to pay her way home all the way from America when you don’t have to!” She advises him against the whole enterprise; it would be too expensive and it wasn’t necessary. Barbro seemed to have taken it into her head that his happiness would be founded on her.

They came to an agreement in the course of the night. They weren’t strangers to one another, after all, but had often discussed every single thing before. The requisite wedding ceremony would take place before St. Olav’s Day and the haymaking; they didn’t have to pretend—Barbro herself was now more eager than he to hurry things up. Aksel was not offended by Barbro’s eagerness and his suspicion was not aroused; rather, he was flattered and excited by her haste. Well, he was a denizen of the wilds, a hard-nosed character; he was anything but particular and damned little refined, being forced to do both this and that and looking to what was useful. Moreover, he found Barbro to be all new and pretty again, almost lovelier than before. She was like an apple, and he bit into it. After all, the banns had already been read for them.

As for the dead child and the trial, neither said a word.

However, they did talk about Oline, how they were to get rid of her. “She has to go!” Barbro said. “We have nothing to thank her for. She’s a vicious scandalmonger.” But it proved difficult to make Oline go away.

Already the first morning Barbro showed herself, old Oline must have dimly perceived her fate. She instantly felt ill at ease, but didn’t let on, nodded and put out a chair. The days had gone by quietly, one after another, at Måneland, with Aksel carrying water and firewood and doing the heaviest work for her, while Oline had managed the rest. In the course of time she had made up her mind to remain there for the rest of her life, but here came Barbro and spoiled it all.

“If there had been a grain of coffee in the house, I would’ve given it to you,” she said to Barbro. “Are you going farther upcountry?”—“No,” Barbro replied. “Oh, you aren’t going any farther up?”—“No.”—“Well, it’s none of my business,” Oline said. “You’ll be going down again, then?”—“No, not that either. I’ll be staying here for the time being.”—“Oh, staying here, are you?”—“Yes, I guess so.”

Oline waits a while, using her old head, full of politics. “Well,” she says, “then I won’t have to, I suppose. I couldn’t be more pleased!”—“O-o-h,” Barbro says in jest, “has Aksel been that unfair to you?”—“Unfair? Him? You shouldn’t go to the trouble of making fun of an old woman who is only looking forward to redemption! Aksel has been like a father and a high envoy for me every day and hour, I cannot say anything else. But as it is, I have none of my own folks in these parts, and I walk, lonely and forsaken, on other folks’ property and have all my kin on the other side of the mountain.”

But Oline stayed on. They couldn’t part with her until after the wedding, and Oline hemmed and hawed but said at long last that, sure, she would do them the favor of looking after the house and the animals when they were to be married. It took two days. But Oline didn’t leave even after the newlyweds had come back. She was playing for time—one day she said she was ailing, the next day it looked like rain. She buttered up Barbro with praise of the food—the fare at Måneland was quite different now, and there was coffee in the house, another great difference! Oh, Oline stopped at nothing, asking Barbro’s advice about things she knew better herself: “What do you think, shall I milk the cows in the order they stand in their stalls, or shall I take Bordelin first?”—“You can do as you please.”—“Just as I’ve always said!” Oline exclaims. “You’ve been around the world and met high-ranking and elegant people and learned everything. It’s different with a poor creature like me.”

No, Oline stopped at nothing, but engaged in politics around the clock. Didn’t she even tell Barbro how good friends she was with her father, Brede Olsen, and how well she got along with him! Ho, she had spent many a pleasant hour with him; he was such an excellent fellow, and so good-natured, you never heard a gruff word from his mouth.

But this wouldn’t do in the long run; neither Aksel nor Barbro wanted to keep Oline any longer, and Barbro was taking all the work away from her. Oline didn’t complain, but she would follow her mistress with dangerously flashing eyes, and little by little she changed her tone. “Hm, you’re grand folks now,” she said. “Aksel was in town last fall, you didn’t meet him, did you? No, you were in Bergen. Anyway, he went there for one thing only, to buy a mowing machine and a harrowing machine. What are the Sellanrå folks beside you now? Nothing at all!”

She gave off little pinpricks, but that didn’t help either; neither of them was afraid of her, and one day Aksel told her straight out that now she had to go. “Go?” Oline asked. “How? Am I to crawl?” No, she refused to go on the pretext that she was poorly and couldn’t move her legs. Bad as this would be, it actually happened. When the work was taken away from her and she was no longer active, she collapsed and became truly ill. She dragged herself around for another week or so; Aksel looked daggers at her, but out of malice Oline stayed on and finally had to take to her bed.

And now, lying there, she wasn’t at all waiting for redemption; on the contrary, she counted the hours till she would be up and about again. She asked to see a doctor, a piece of uppishness unheard of in the settlement. “Doctor?” Aksel asked. “Are you out of



your mind?"—"How?" Oline asked gently, nonplussed. Oh, she was so meek and mealy-mouthed, so glad at not being a burden to others, she could pay the doctor herself. "You can?" Aksel asked. "Why not?" Oline said. "I'm not supposed to just lie here, dying like a beast in the sight of my redeemer, am I?" Now Barbro stuck her nose into it and asked cautiously, "What's wrong? Aren't you getting your meals, which I bring to you in your room? But I've refused to give you coffee, for your own good."—"Is that you, Barbro?" Oline says, merely turning her eyes toward her; she is very poorly and, with the whites of her eyes turned up, looks quite sinister. "I suppose you're right, Barbro, that I would get worse if I had a tiny drop of coffee, a spoonful of coffee."—"If you were like me, you would have other things to think about than coffee right now," Barbro said. "Just as I've always said," Oline replied. "You were never one of those who desired anyone's death, but that they should be converted and live. What—what's that I'm seeing! Are you with child, Barbro?"—"Me?" Barbro cries, adding furiously, "I should throw you on the dunghill for your tongue, that would serve you right!"

For one thoughtful moment, the sick woman is silent, but her lips quaver as if itching to smile but having to refrain. "Last night I heard something calling," she says. "She's gone out of her mind," Aksel whispers. "No, I've not gone out of my mind. Something like a call. It came from the woods or from the creek. It was eerie, like a little child crying. Did Barbro go away?"—"Yes," Aksel said, "she didn't want to listen to any more of your nonsense."—"I'm not talking nonsense, I haven't gone as far out of my mind as you think," Oline says. "No, it's not the Almighty's will and pleasure that I shall go before the throne and the Lamb yet, with all that I know about Måneland. I'll recover, all right; but you have to fetch the doctor for me, Aksel, then it'll be quicker. That cow you're going to give me, which one is it?"—"What cow?"—"The cow you promised me? Is it Bordelin?"—"You're wandering," Aksel says. "You promised me a cow that day when I saved your life, you know that."—"I know nothing of the sort."

Then Oline raises her head and stares at him. She is so bald and gray and, with her head protruding from a long bird's neck, she looks like a dreadful creature out of some fairy tale; a twinge passes through Aksel, and he gropes behind his back for the door handle. "I see," Oline says, "you're one of those! We won't talk any more about it for the present. I can live without the cow from this day forth and won't ever mention it again. But it was good that you showed yourself as just the sort of man you are, Aksel, so I'll know another time."

But in the night Oline died, at some hour during the night; in any case, she was cold when they went into her room in the morning.

Old Oline—born and now dead. . . .

Neither Aksel nor Barbro minded being able to bury her for good; there were now fewer things to watch out for, they ought to be happy. Barbro is again complaining about toothache, otherwise everything is fine. But that everlasting woolen muffler over her mouth, which she has to pull away every time she wants to say a word, is no small nuisance, and Aksel is baffled by such a bad toothache. To be sure, he has noticed the careful way she chews her food all the time, but not a single tooth was missing in her mouth, after all. "Didn't you get a set of new teeth?" he asks. "Oh, yes."—"And are they aching, too?"—"All you can do is joke about it!" Barbro replies angrily, although he had asked in good faith. And in her bitterness she happens to hew closer to the truth: "You understand quite well what's the matter with me."

What was the matter with her? Looking a little more closely, he has the impression that she has already got a paunch. "You aren't going to have a child, are you?" he asks. "You must know I am," she replies. He gives her an idiotic smile. Being slow, he sits there counting for a while: one week, two weeks, going on the third week. "Must know?" he says. Barbro is extremely irritated by this debate and bursts into a loud fit of weeping, carrying on as though she felt wronged: "Why don't you just sink me into the ground, then you'll be rid of me!" she says.

Strange what a woman could take into her head to cry about.

No, Aksel has no intention of sinking her into the ground, he is a hard-nosed fellow and looks to what is useful; he has no desire to walk on a carpet of flowers. "You can't rake in the field this summer, then, can you?" he asks. "Can't I rake?" she replies, dismayed. And good heavens, the sort of things that can suddenly make a woman smile! When Aksel took it that way, a hysterical joy shot through Barbro and she exclaimed, "I'll rake for two! I'll show you, Aksel, I'll do all you set me to and much more. I'll wear myself out and be glad to boot, if only you will be satisfied!"

There were more tears and smiles and tenderness. There were only the two of them in the wilderness, with no one to fear, open doors, summer heat, the buzzing of flies. She was so complaisant and loving, wanting just the same as he in all things.

After sunset he hitches up his horse to the mowing machine, meaning to mow a small parcel for the next day. Barbro comes out real quick, as if she has an errand, and says, "Aksel, how could you think of bringing someone home from America? She wouldn't get here before winter, you know, and what would you need her for then?" Barbro must have figured this out, and now she came running out with it, as if that was necessary.

But it wasn't at all necessary. Aksel had realized from the very start that, when he accepted Barbro, he gained a woman's help for the whole year. He has his feet planted solidly on the ground and doesn't have his head in the clouds. Now that he has a woman of his own to take care of the house, he can even keep the telegraph for a while longer. That is a lot of money each year, and a great help as long as he can't sell very much produce. Everything is moving along, and he is at the heart of things. And from Brede, who is now his father-in-law, he no longer expects any further attacks on the telegraph line.

Fortune is truly beginning to smile on Aksel.

## XI

And time goes by, the winter passes, spring is here again.

One day Isak simply had to go to the village. They asked him what business he had there. "Oh, I don't know," he replied. But he swept the cart spotlessly clean, put in the seat and drove off. It goes without saying that he had with him various foodstuffs intended for Eleseus at Storborg. No horse ever left Sellanrå without something or other for Eleseus.

The sight of Isak driving down through the settlement was not an unimportant occurrence, for he came so rarely; Sivert usually went instead. At the first two farms, the folks stand in the doorway of their huts, saying to one another, "There is Isak himself, I wonder what he'll bring back today." When he gets as far down as Måneland, Barbro stands at the window with a child on her arm; seeing him, she thinks, There is Isak himself!

He stops when he gets to Storborg. "Whoa! Is Eleseus home?" Eleseus comes out. Yes, he's home, he hasn't left yet, but will soon; he is making his spring excursion to the cities down south. "Here's something your mother asked me to give you," his father says. "I don't know what it is, but it can't be anything special." Eleseus accepts the containers, thanks him and asks, "You don't have a letter or suchlike, do you?"—"Yes," his father replies and begins to search his pockets, "and that, I believe, is from little Rebecca." Eleseus takes the letter, which is what he has been waiting for, he can feel it is nice and thick. Then he says to his father, "Too bad you came so early, two days early. But if you wait a bit, you can take my trunk down."

Isak gets off and ties up the horse. He takes a turn down the field. Andresen, the little assistant, is anything but a poor farmer on Eleseus' behalf; true, he has had Sivert come down from Sellanrå with the horse, but he has also drained a good deal of bog on his own and hired a man to help him line the trenches with stone. They wouldn't have to buy any feed at Storborg this year, and next year Eleseus might have a horse of his own. For this he owed thanks to Andresen's interest in farming.

At long last Eleseus calls that he has finished packing his trunk. And he, too, is ready to come along; dressed in a handsome blue suit, he has a white collar around his neck, galoshes on his feet and a cane in his hand. To be sure, he will now get there over two days ahead of time for the packet boat, but that doesn't matter; he can stay in the village while waiting, it doesn't matter where he is.

Father and son drive off. Standing in the door of the shop, Andresen says, "Have a good trip!"

The father is solicitous about his boy and wants him to have the seat all to himself, but Eleseus declines instantly and sits down beside his father. When they pass Breidablik, Eleseus suddenly remembers he has forgotten something. "Whoa! What is it?" his father asks. Oh, it is the umbrella, Eleseus' umbrella, that has been left behind, but that he can't mention, so he just says, "It can't be helped. Drive on!"—"Shouldn't we turn around?"—"No, drive on!" But why the hell did he have to be so forgetful! He was in a hurry, because his father was walking about in the field, waiting. Now Eleseus would have to buy a new umbrella when he got to Trondhjem. It didn't make any difference whether he had one or two umbrellas. Meanwhile he is sufficiently annoyed with himself to jump off and walk behind the cart.

They cannot talk much together that way, because his father has to turn around and speak over his shoulder every time. The father asks, "How long will you be away?" and Eleseus replies, "Oh, about three weeks, or at most a month." His father wonders why people in the big cities don't get lost and go astray. But Eleseus replies that, as far as he was concerned, he was used to cities; he didn't get lost, it had never happened. His father feels it is a shame that he alone is riding and says, "Now you must drive for a while, I'm tired of it." But Eleseus refuses point-blank to turn his father out of his seat, so instead he gets into the cart again himself. But first they stop and have a meal out of the father's nice food pack. Then they drive on.

When they get to the two homesteads farthest down, it is easy to see that they are approaching the village; indeed, in both places they have white curtains on the little window facing the road, and on the gables of the hayloft a small flagpole has been put up for the Constitution Day, the 17th of May. "There is Isak himself!" say the folks in the two new homesteads when they see the travelers.

Eleseus finally manages to turn his thoughts sufficiently away from his own person and his own things to ask, "What are you going to pick up today?"—"Hm," his father replies, "it's nothing special." But since Eleseus was going away, there would be no harm in telling him. "I'm going to pick up Jensine, at the blacksmith's," his father explains or rather admits. "Why should you go to the trouble of coming down here on that account, couldn't Sivert have done it?" Eleseus asks. Eleseus just didn't understand any better, thinking that Sivert would go to the blacksmith's and pick up Jensine after she had once acted so grand and left Sellanrå.

The haying had not gone well last year. Sure enough, Inger had kept at it just as she had promised, Leopoldine had done her share as well, and besides they had a horse-drawn rake. But the hay was partly heavy timothy and the fields to be raked were wide. Sellanrå was now a large farm, and besides the womenfolk had other things to do than rake hay; there were all the animals to see to, meals to get ready on time, cheese-making and churning, laundry and baking—mother and daughter were wearing themselves out. Isak did not want to go through another summer like that, so he simply decided that Jensine should come back, if she could be persuaded to. Nor did Inger have anything against it anymore, she had recovered her common sense and said, "Do what you please as far as I'm concerned!" Oh, Inger had become more reasonable now, common sense is no small thing to get back after having been lost. Inger no longer had any ardor to barter away, no wildness in the blood to keep under control; winter had cooled her off, leaving her with sufficient ardor for domestic use. She had begun to fill out, to grow handsome, stately. She was a remarkable woman in that she didn't fade, or die piecemeal; she had started blooming so late, maybe that was why. God only knows where all things come from, nothing

has a single cause, everything has a *series* of causes. Didn't Inger have the best of reputations with the blacksmith's wife? What could any blacksmith's wife condemn her for? With her disfigured face she was cheated out of the springtime of her life, and later she was placed in an artificial atmosphere and lost out on six years of her summer; since she had still the stirrings of life in her, her fall could not avoid showing some aberrations. Inger was better than such a blacksmith's wife, a bit damaged, a bit warped, but good by nature, capable by nature. . . .

Father and son are on the road, driving to Brede Olsen's lodging house; they put the horse in the shed. It is evening. They walk in.

Brede Olsen has rented this house, originally an outhouse belonging to the storekeeper; now it is fitted out with two living rooms and two bedrooms. It is well situated and not bad at all; the place is patronized by coffee drinkers and by people from the surrounding community who will be going by the packet boat.

Brede seems to have been lucky for once, he has found his niche, for which he can thank his wife. In fact, Brede's wife got the idea for this coffee house and lodgings when she was selling coffee during the auction at Breidablik; it was such fun to do business, to feel money between your fingers, cash. Things have been going really well since she came down here; she is now selling coffee in earnest and putting up many a mortal without a roof over his head. Travelers give her their blessings. She is greatly helped, of course, by Katrine, her daughter, now a big girl and good at waiting on tables in her parents' house. For the present business is fairly good, and that is the main thing. The beginning was decidedly good, and could have been even better if the storekeeper hadn't run out of twists and cookies to serve with the coffee. There sat all those folks celebrating the 17th of May calling in vain for cakes with their coffee, coffee cakes! This taught the storekeeper to be well supplied with bread and cake during local festivities.

The family and Brede himself support themselves as best they can by this business. It means coffee and leftover coffee cake at very many meals, but it keeps body and soul together and gives the children a delicate, if not refined, appearance. "Not everyone can afford cake with their coffee," the villagers say. The Brede family seem to be doing well; they even keep a dog, which slinks about among the guests and gets tidbits and grows fat. It is amazing how such a fat dog can promote the lifestyle of a lodging house!

Brede Olsen himself occupies the position of master in this house, but he has also worked himself up otherwise. He had once more become the sheriff's attendant and bailiff, and was kept busy quite frequently for a while; but last fall Barbro, his daughter, fell out with the sheriff's wife over a trifle, frankly speaking a louse, and since that time Brede is no longer welcome in that genteel household. But it hasn't cost Brede much: other gentry now seek him out simply to annoy the sheriff's wife. Thus, he is in demand as a driver for the doctor, and the parson's wife would be glad to send for Brede to butcher many more pigs than she actually has—these are his own words.

Still, the Brede family can certainly be hard up many a time, they aren't all as fat as the dog. But Brede has a cheerful heart, thank God. "The children are getting bigger and bigger," he says, although new little ones are also constantly arriving. Those who are grown and have left the nest take care of themselves and also send something home now and then. Barbro is married at Måneland and Helge has gone herring-fishing; they put aside a bit of goods or money for their parents whenever they can. Even Katrine, who waits on tables at home, managed, strangely enough, to slip a five-kroner bill to her father last winter, when their situation was at its worst. "That's some girl!" Brede said; he didn't ask her who had given her the bill or what she had been given it for. That's the way it should be: children should have some feeling for their parents and help them.

Brede is not fully satisfied with Helge, his son, in this respect; now and then he will stand in the store setting forth his view about children's duties toward their parents before an audience. "Look, for example, at Helge, my son. I don't mind if he uses a bit of tobacco and takes a drink, we have all been boys. But he shouldn't send us one letter after another with nothing in it but good wishes. He shouldn't make his mother cry. That shows a bad character. In the old days things were different; no sooner were the children grown than they went into service and began to send their parents a bit of help. Isn't that the way it should be? Wasn't it their father and mother who first carried them under their hearts and sweated blood to keep them alive while they were growing up? Should all that be forgotten!"

It was as though Helge had heard his father's words: there came a letter from him with a bill inside, a fifty-kroner bill, no less. And now the Brede family had a great time, buying in their extravagance both meat and fish for dinner and a hanging lamp with prisms on it for the best room in the lodging house.

One day followed another, and what more can one ask? The Brede family lived too, lived from hand to mouth but without great fear. What more can one ask! . . .

"Such strangers dropping by!" Brede said, showing Isak and Eleseus into the room with the prismatic lamp. "What do I see! Well, you, Isak, aren't going away, are you?"—"No, I'm just going to the blacksmith's about something."—"Ah, then Eleseus must be going to all those cities in the south again?"<sup>10</sup> Being used to hotels, Eleseus makes himself at home, hangs his coat and cane on the wall and orders coffee; his father has food in his bag. Katrine brings the coffee. "No, you don't have to pay!" Brede says. "I've enjoyed many a treat at Sellanrå, and Eleseus carries me on his books; you mustn't take a penny, Katrine!" But Eleseus pays, takes out his wallet and pays, and gives twenty øre extra. No nonsense there.

Isak goes to the blacksmith's home while Eleseus stays on.

He says what has to be said to Katrine, but no more, preferring to talk with her father. No, Eleseus doesn't care for girls; he seems to have been fooled by a girl once and has since lost interest. Maybe he never had any sex drive worth mentioning, since he is now good for nothing. An odd man in the wilds, a gentleman with the thin hands of a clerk and a woman's flair for finery, for sporting an

umbrella, galoshes and a cane. Fooled, and all changed, an unfathomable bachelor. Whatever mustache will sprout on his upper lip will not be particularly brutal. But maybe this boy, who came of good stock and was well endowed, was turned into a changeling by the artificial milieu in which he later found himself. Did he become so diligent, behind an office desk or a shop counter, that all his original nature was lost? Maybe so. In any case, here he is, sweet and apathetic, a bit weak, a bit nonchalant, going more and more astray. He could envy every man in the settlement, but is not even equal to that.

Katrine, who is used to joking with the guests, asks him teasingly if he is going south to see his sweetheart again. "I have other things to think about," Eleseus replies, "I'm going on business, to make connections."—"You mustn't be so forward with people of higher station, Katrine!" her father reprimands her. Oh, Brede Olsen is so polite to Eleseus, it is a wonder how respectful he is. And why shouldn't he be? It is only shrewd, seeing he owes money at Storborg; he is face-to-face with his creditor. And Eleseus? Ho, he likes his politeness very much and is kind and gracious in return. "Esteemed sir!" he called Brede just for fun, showing off. He mentions that he forgot to bring his umbrella: "We had just passed Breidablik, when I suddenly remembered the umbrella!"—"You'll be going to our little merchant's place for a toddy tonight, I suppose?" Brede says. "If I had been by myself, sure. But I came here with Father." Brede makes himself agreeable and goes on talking: "The day after tomorrow a fellow who's returning to America will be coming here."—"Has he been home on a visit?"—"Yes. He is from the upper village. He's been away for ever so many years, but has been home over the winter. His trunk has already arrived by cart, and what a trunk!"—"I've thought of America myself occasionally," Eleseus says candidly. "You?" Brede cries. "Why should that be necessary for you?"—"I might not stay there forever, that I can't say. But I've been traveling to so many places, I might as well make that trip too."—"Why not? And they must make heaps of money and things in America. Take that fellow I was talking about: he has paid for one Christmas dance after another in the upper village this winter, and when he comes here he says, 'Give me a pot of coffee and all the coffee cakes you've got!' he says. Would you like to see his trunk?"

They went into the hallway to look at the trunk. A miracle on earth, flamed on every side with metals and fittings, with three latches in addition to the lock. "Burglarproof!" Brede said, as if he had tried it.

When they went back to the room again, Eleseus had grown quiet. This American from the upper village made him into a nobody, going on his travels like a high government official; Brede was plainly occupied with this person. Eleseus ordered more coffee and tried to act rich, too: he ordered cake with his coffee and let the dog have it. But, alas, he still felt inferior and downcast. What was his own trunk beside that wonder out there! There it stood—black oilcloth, the corners worn and white, a mere valise. By Jove, he would buy himself a splendid trunk when he got to the south, take note of that! "You shouldn't bother to give the dog anything," Brede said. Having regained a bit of his old self, Eleseus showed off again: "That dog has a tremendous talent for being fat," he said.

With one thought leading to another, he interrupted his chat with Brede and went out, to see to the horse in the shed. Here he opened the letter he was carrying in his pocket. He had put it away without checking how much money it contained; he had gotten these letters from home before and there had always been several bills in them, a help on his travels. But what was this? A big sheet of gray paper, painted over and over by little Rebecca for her brother Eleseus, and a short letter from his mother. What else? Nothing else. No money.

His mother wrote that she couldn't bring herself to ask his father for money anymore, for there wasn't much left of the wealth they had gotten when they sold the copper mountain; it had been used to buy Storborg and afterward to pay for all the merchandise and Eleseus' many travels. He must try to manage by himself on this trip, for the money that was still left had to go to his siblings, so that they, too, weren't left completely without. A pleasant trip and fond regards.

No money.

Eleseus himself hadn't enough money for the trip south, he had combed through the till in his store without finding very much. Oh, how stupid he'd been to send his dealer in Bergen some money on account a short while ago. It could have waited. Also, it had obviously been careless of him to set out without first opening the letter; he could have spared himself the drive to the village with his miserable trunk. Now he was stuck here. . . .

His father returns from the blacksmith's house after carrying out his errand: he would pick up Jensine tomorrow. For Jensine hadn't been stubborn and hard to get at all; she had immediately understood that they needed help for the summer at Sellanrå, and she was not opposed to coming. Fair and square behavior again.

While his father is talking, Eleseus is occupied with his own thoughts. He shows his father the American's trunk and says, "I wouldn't mind being where this trunk came from."—"Well, you could do worse," his father replies. . . .

In the morning the father gets ready to go back home; he eats, hitches up the horse and drives over to the blacksmith's to pick up Jensine and her chest. Eleseus follows them with his eyes as they drive away, and when they disappear at the edge of the wood, he pays up at the lodging house again and hands out tips. "Just let my trunk stand there till I get back!" he tells Katrine and is off.

Where is Eleseus off to? There is only one place where he can go: he turns around, forced to fall back on his home. He, too, makes his way up through the common, taking care to stay as close on the heels of his father and Jensine as possible without being seen. As he walks and walks, he begins to envy every settler in the wilds.

It's too bad about Eleseus, he is so lost.

Doesn't he have a business at Storborg? But he can't live like a lord on that; he makes too many interesting journeys in order to establish contacts, and they cost too much—he does not travel cheaply. "We mustn't be petty," Eleseus says, giving twenty øre when

he could have managed with ten. The business simply cannot support this open-handed man, he must have subsidies from home. The Storborg farm produces a sufficient amount of potatoes, grain and hay, but the meat has to come from Sellanrå. Is that all? Sivert has to cart Eleseus' merchandise up from the dock for nothing. And is that all? His mother has to get money out of his father to pay for his travels. But is that really all?

The worst remains.

Eleseus is doing business like a madman. He is so flattered when people from the village come and shop at Storborg that he willingly gives them credit; when this is rumored, more and more people come and buy on credit, and the business goes to rack and ruin. Eleseus is kind and gives tick, the store is emptied and is filled again. All of this costs money. Who pays? His father.

At first his mother was a faithful spokesperson for him: Eleseus was the brainy one in the family and had to be given a proper start; just remember how he acquired Storborg on the cheap and that he knew exactly what he would give for it! When his father thought that his trade was getting to be a joke, his mother replied, "What are you saying!" Indeed, she protested against such rude expressions, as if good old Isak had been a bit too bold with Eleseus.

The mother had traveled herself, after all, and could see that Eleseus was really unhappy in the wilds; he had become accustomed to a more refined way of life, had moved in different social circles, and here he had no peers. He gave too much credit to shabby people, but it was not done out of malice or to ruin his parents; he did it only by virtue of his kind and noble disposition: he simply had to help people who were his social inferiors. Goodness, he was the only man in the back country to use a white handkerchief which constantly had to be washed! If he answered no when folks confidently turned to him and asked for credit, it could be misunderstood, taken to mean that he wasn't as decent a fellow as generally assumed. Besides, he had certain duties as the city person and genius that he was among the settlers.

His mother considered all these things.

But one day his father, who didn't understand a syllable of it, opened her eyes and ears and said, "Look here, this is what's left of the money for the copper mountain."—"Oh," she said, "and the rest?"—"Eleseus got it all." She clapped her hands and exclaimed, "Well, then he has to come to his senses!"

Poor Eleseus, he is so frittered away, so topsy-turvy. He probably should have been a settler from day one, now he is someone who has learned to write the letters of the alphabet; he is without initiative, without depth. But he is no pitch-black devil of a man, he is not in love and not ambitious, he is next to nothing, not even a great nuisance.

The young man seems doomed, haunted by misfortune; it is as though he has suffered some internal injury. Perhaps the good district engineer from the city shouldn't have discovered him as a child and taken him into his house to make something of him; the boy probably got his roots torn and fared badly. Whatever he now undertakes can be traced back to something defective in him, something dark on a light ground. . . .

He walks and walks. The two riders pass Storborg, Eleseus makes a wide curve and also passes Storborg; what was there for him to do at home, in his store? The riders arrive at Sellanrå during the night, with Eleseus close upon their heels. He sees Sivert coming out into the yard, surprised at seeing Jensine; the two of them shake hands and laugh softly, before Sivert takes the horse to the stable.

Now Eleseus, the family's pride, ventures to come forth. He doesn't walk, he sneaks his way; in the stable he meets Sivert. "It's only me," he says. "You, too!" Sivert says, once more surprised.

The two brothers strike up a hushed conversation: the question is whether Sivert can get his mother to obtain some money, a way out, travel money. Things cannot go on this way, Eleseus is sick and tired of it, he has been thinking about it for a long time, it must be done tonight, a long journey, America, tonight. "America?" Sivert says aloud. "Hssh! I've been thinking about it for a long time, and now you must get Mother to agree, things can't go on this way and I've been thinking about it for a long time."—"But America?" Sivert says. "No, that you mustn't do!"—"I definitely must. If I go back right away, I'll catch the packet boat."—"You'll have something to eat, won't you?"—"I'm not hungry."—"Won't you sleep a bit?"—"No."

Sivert wishes his brother well and holds him back, but Eleseus is determined, for once he is determined. Sivert is all in a tizzy: first, he must have felt a bit strange at seeing Jensine again, and now Eleseus wanted to leave the place altogether, leave this world, so to speak. "What are you going to do with Storborg?" he asks. "Andresen can have it," Eleseus replies. "Andresen can have it, how?"—"Isn't he going to marry Leopoldine?"—"I know nothing about that. Well, I suppose he is."

They talk and talk in hushed tones. Sivert is of the opinion that his father had better come out, so that Eleseus can talk with him in person, but Eleseus whispers back, "No, no, he's not up to that, he has never been much good at facing up to situations of that sort but has always had to use a go-between."—"You know what Mother is like," Sivert says. "You won't get anywhere with her for tears and distress. She mustn't know about it."—"No," Eleseus says too, "she mustn't know about it."

Sivert leaves, is away for an eternity and returns with money, lots of money. "Listen, this is all he has, do you think it'll be enough? Count it, he didn't count it."—"What did Father say?"—"Not much. Now, if you wait a moment I'll put on some more clothes and see you on your way."—"Don't trouble yourself, you must go to bed."—"You won't be afraid of the dark in the stable while I'm gone, will you?" Sivert asks in a feeble attempt at cheeriness.

He is away for just a moment, and when he comes back he is dressed and with his father's food bag over his shoulder. As they step out, their father is standing there. "I'm told you're going so far away," he says. "Yes," Eleseus replies, "but I'll be back."—"But I'm

just wasting your time,” the old man mumbles and turns around. “Have a pleasant voyage!” he bleats strangely over his shoulder and quickly goes away.

The two brothers start out down the road; after a while they sit down to eat. Eleseus is hungry, he can scarcely get enough. It is a beautiful spring night, and from the hills here and there come the mating calls of the blackcock, a homey sound which makes the emigrant lose heart for a moment. “What nice weather,” he says. “But now you must go back, Sivert!”—“Oh well,” Sivert says, continuing on. They walk past Storborg, past Breidablik, with the blackcock calling on some hill or other all along. It is not brass-band music as in the cities, no, but it is voices, a proclamation: spring is here. Suddenly the first songbird is heard from a treetop; it awakens others, there are questions and answers everywhere, it is more than an ordinary song, it is a song of praise. The emigrant is likely to feel a touch of nostalgia, of something helpless; he is going to America, and no one could be more ripe for it than he. “Now you must go back, Sivert!” he says. “All right,” his brother answers, “since you want me to.”

Sitting down at the edge of the wood, they see the village just below them, the store, the dock, Brede’s lodging house; some men are padding about down by the packet boat, getting ready.

“I don’t think I can sit here any longer,” Eleseus says, getting up again. “It’s too bad you’re going so far away,” Sivert says. “I’ll be back,” Eleseus answers. “And then I won’t be traveling only with an oilcloth valise!”

When they say goodbye, Sivert slips a little thing into his brother’s hand, something wrapped in paper. “What is it?” Eleseus asks. “Write to us often, will you!” Sivert replies. Then he leaves.

Eleseus opens the piece of paper and takes a peek: it is the gold coin, a twenty-krone piece in gold. “Oh, you shouldn’t!” he calls. Sivert walks on.

After walking for a while, he turns around and sits down at the edge of the wood again. There is more and more activity down by the packet boat, he can see people boarding; his brother goes on board, the boat pushes off and moves away. Eleseus is on his way to America.

He never returned.

## XII

A curious procession is heading up toward Sellanrå, rather ludicrous as a procession perhaps, but not only ludicrous: they are three men carrying huge loads, with bags hanging down from their shoulders front and back. Walking single file, they call jesting remarks to one another, but they are heavily laden. Little Andresen, the assistant, heads the procession, which as it happens is his: he has fitted out himself, Sivert Sellanrå, and a third man, Fredrik Strøm from Breidablik, for this expedition. A helluva fellow that Andresen—a little man, he walks with one shoulder skewed toward the ground and with his jacket pulled awry at the neck, but he carries his load on and on.

He has not directly bought Storborg and the store left by Eleseus, that he cannot afford; he can better afford to wait a while and maybe get it all for nothing. Andresen is no fool, for the present he has a lease on the farm and manages the store.

He has gone through the inventory and found lots of unsalable goods in Eleseus' store, from toothbrushes to embroidered runners, even to little birds on steel wires which said "peep" when squeezed in the right place.

And now he has set out on a ramble with all these goods, aiming to sell them to the miners on the other side of the mountain. He knows, from Aaronsen's days, that miners with money will buy anything and everything. The only thing he is vexed at is that he had to leave behind six rocking horses which Eleseus purchased on his last trip to Bergen.

The caravan enters the yard at Sellanrå and they put down their loads. They do not rest for long; as soon as they have had some milk to drink and offered their merchandise to the folks on the farm for the fun of it, they shoulder their loads again and move on. It is not just fun they are after. They lumber off through the woods headed south.

They walk until noon, have a meal and walk again till evening. Then they make a fire, pitch camp and sleep a while. Sivert sleeps sitting on a stone he calls a padded chair. Oh, Sivert is wise enough in the wilds. The sun has heated up the stone all day, making it a good place to sit and sleep. His companions are not so knowledgeable and refuse to listen to advice; lying down in the heather, they wake up feeling cold and sneezing. Then they have breakfast and start off again.

They have begun to listen for sounds of blasting, hoping to come across people and mines later in the day; the operation must have advanced way up from the sea in the direction of Sellanrå by now. But there is no sound of blasting. They walk till noon without meeting a soul, but now and then they pass some big holes in the ground that have been dug on trial. What does it all mean? It means, no doubt, that the ore is extremely rich at this end of the mountain, that they take out pure heavy copper and barely get up from the coast.

In the afternoon they come across several mines but no miners; they walk till evening and can already see the ocean down below. They wander through a wilderness of abandoned mines and hear no blasts; it is all very strange. And now they have to make a fire and pitch camp for another night. They ask one another: Has the operation been closed down? Should they turn around with their loads? "Out of the question!" Andresen says.

In the morning a man comes up to their camp, a pale and care-worn man who knits his brows and stares at them, scrutinizing them. "Is that you, Andresen?" the man says. It is Aaronsen, the shopkeeper. He doesn't say no to a cup of hot coffee and something to eat with the caravan and settles down. "I saw your smoke and wanted to find out what it was," he explains. "I thought to myself, You'll see they've come to their senses and will be starting work again. And then it was only the three of you! Where are you off to?"—"This is it."—"What are you carrying?"—"Merchandise."—"Merchandise?" Aaronsen screams. "You come here to sell merchandise? To whom? There are no people here. They left on Saturday."—"Who left?"—"Everyone. The place is deserted. And besides, I've got merchandise aplenty. I have a storeful for sale, if you're interested in buying."

Oh, Aaronsen is in a bad way again, the mines have been shut down.

They calm him down with some more coffee and pump him for information.

Aaronsen shakes his head. "It's unspeakable, quite incomprehensible!" he says. Everything was going so well and he sold merchandise and took in money, the surrounding community flourished and could afford white porridge and new schools, prismatic lamps and city boots. Then the gentlemen decide it is no longer profitable and shut it down. "It's not profitable? It was profitable before! Didn't copper ore come to light after every single blasting shot? It's sheer fraud. And it never occurs to them that they make it extremely awkward for a man like me. But it's no doubt true what people are saying, that Geissler is to blame, as before. No sooner did he get here than the work stopped, as if he had smelled it."

"Is Geissler here?"

"Isn't he here! He should've been shot. He came one day by the packet boat. 'How is it going?' he asked the engineer. 'In my opinion it's going well,' the engineer replied. But Geissler just stood there and asked again, 'Oh, it's going well?'—'Yes. As far as I know,' the engineer replied. But worse luck, when the mail was opened there was both a letter and a telegram for the engineer to the effect that it was no longer profitable and he should shut down."

The members of the caravan look at one another, but the head man, Andresen, doesn't seem to have been discouraged. "You may just as well turn around and go home again," Aaronsen advises them. "That we won't do," Andresen replies, packing away the coffee

pot. Aaronsen stares at all three in turn. "You're crazy!" he says.

Andresen obviously doesn't take much notice of his former boss, now he is himself boss; he is the one who fitted out this expedition to distant parts, and to turn around here on the mountain would mean a loss of prestige for him. "But where will you go?" Aaronsen asks angrily. "I don't know," Andresen replies. But he knows what he means to do, all right; he is probably thinking of the natives: that here they came, three men strong, with glass beads and finger rings. "Come, let's go!" he tells his comrades.

Apparently Aaronsen had intended to go farther up this morning, since he was well started; maybe he wanted to see whether all the mines were empty, whether it was true that every man was gone. But his purpose is thwarted by these peddlers, who are so eager to press on; he feels compelled time and again to advise them not to persist. Aaronsen is furious; as he walks down in front of the caravan, he constantly turns around and screams to them, barking at them to defend his domain. He goes on this way until they arrive at the mining village with its barracks.

It is empty and dismal. The most essential tools and machines have been housed, but logs and planks, broken vehicles, crates and barrels lie strewn about everywhere; some buildings have "keep out" notices posted on them.

"There you can see!" Aaronsen cries. "Not a soul! So where are you going?" And he threatens the caravan with disaster and the sheriff; he himself will follow them step by step to see whether they sell illegal goods. Then there will be prison and hard labor, without fail.

Suddenly someone calls Sivert. The village is not completely deserted, not stone-dead, a man is waving from the corner of a building. Sivert lumbers toward him with his load and sees at once who it is: it is Geissler.

"A strange coincidence!" Geissler says. His face is red, blooming, but his eyes have apparently become sore from exposure to the spring sun, he is wearing a gray pince-nez. His speech is brisk as before: "A splendid coincidence!" he says. "It'll save me the trip to Sellanrå, I have my hands full. How many homesteads are there in the common now?"—"Ten."—"Ten homesteads? I'll give the nod to that, I'm satisfied. The country is supposed to have thirty-two thousand men like your father, I say and nod again, I've figured it out."

"Are you coming, Sivert?" comes a call from the caravan. Geissler takes notice and replies quickly, "No!"—"I'll catch up with you," Sivert calls back and puts down his load.

The two men sit down and talk; fired up, Geissler is quiet only each time Sivert gives a brief answer, then he starts again: "A unique coincidence, I can't forget it! Everything has gone so well on my trip, and here I meet you, sparing me the detour over Sellanrå. Is everything all right at home?"—"Yes, and thanks for asking."—"Have you put up the hayloft over the cow barn already?"—"Yes."—"As for myself, I'm so busy, it may soon get out of hand. Do you see, for example, where we're sitting now, my dear Sivert? On the ruins of a town! Men built this thing you see here in the teeth of their own best interests. At bottom, I'm the one to blame for everything—that is, I'm one of the go-betweens in a little comedy of circumstance. It all began when your father found some small stones up in the mountain and let you play with them as a child. That was how it began. I knew very well that those stones were worth exactly as much as people would be willing to give for them; good, I put a price on them and bought them. Later the stones went from hand to hand and wreaked great havoc. Time passed. I showed up here a few days ago, and do you know what I wanted to do here? Buy the stones back again!"

Geissler is silent and looks at Sivert. Then he catches sight of the bag and suddenly asks, "What are you carrying?"—"Merchandise," Sivert replies, "we're going down to the village with it."

Geissler doesn't seem interested in the answer, or perhaps didn't hear it, and he continues, "Buy the stones back, that is. Last time I let my son do the sale—he's a young man of your age and otherwise nothing. He's the lightning in the family, I'm the fog. I'm one of those who know what's right but do not do it. But he's the lightning; for the time being he has placed himself in the service of industry. He was the one who sold for me the last time. I'm something, he's not, he's only lightning, the quick modern type. But the lightning, as lightning, is barren. Let's take you people at Sellanrå: you look every day at the blue mountains, they're not invented things, they're old mountains, rooted deep in the past; but they are your companions. There you are, living together with heaven and earth, at one with them, at one with the wide horizon and the rootedness. You have no need of a sword in your hand, you walk through life barehanded and bareheaded in the midst of a great kindness. Look, there is nature, it belongs to you and yours! Man and nature do not bombard each other, they are agreed; they do not compete or run a race for something, they go together. You Sellanrå folks live and have your being in the midst of all this. The mountains, the forest, the moors, the meadows, the sky and the stars—there is nothing paltry or apportioned about all this, it is without measure. Listen to me, Sivert: Be contented! You have everything to live on, everything to live for, everything to believe in; you're born and you bring forth, you are vital to the earth. Not everybody is, but you are: vital to the earth. You sustain life. You go on from generation to generation, fulfilling yourselves through sheer breeding; when you die, the new brood takes over. This is what is meant by eternal life. What do you get in return? An existence that's just and strong, an existence based on a true and trusting relationship to everything. What do you get in return? You Sellanrå folks can't be pushed around or bullied, you enjoy calm of mind and authority, and this great kindness all around. That's what you get in return. You lie in a bosom and play with a warm maternal hand and suckle. I'm thinking of your father, he's one of the thirty-two thousand. What is many another? I'm something, I'm the fog, I'm here and there; I swim, at times I'm rain in a dry place. But the others? My son is the lightning, which is nothing; he's the barren flash, he can act. My son is the type of our time, believing sincerely in what the time has taught him, in what the Jew and the Yankee have taught him; I shake my head at it. But I'm



nothing mystical, it's only in my family I'm the fog. There I sit and shake my head. The fact is: I lack the capacity for acting with a clear conscience. If I had that capacity, I could myself be lightning. Now I'm the fog."

Suddenly Geissler seems to recollect himself and asks, "Have you put up the hayloft over the cow barn?"—"Yes. And Father has built another house."—"Another house?"—"On the chance that someone may come, he says, on the chance that Geissler comes, he says." Geissler thinks about it and makes up his mind. "Then I'll have to come, I guess. Yes, I'll come, tell your father that! But I have so much business to attend to. Just now I showed up here and told the engineer, 'Tell those Swedish gentlemen with my compliments that I am a buyer! Then we'll see what comes of it. It doesn't matter to me, I'm not in a hurry.' You should've seen the engineer: here he has worked hard and kept it going, with men and horses and money and machines and lots of trouble; he thought he was doing the right thing, didn't know any better. The more stone he can turn into money, the better; he thinks he's doing something meritorious that way, providing money for the community and the country. Meanwhile he hurtles more and more rapidly toward disaster, and he doesn't understand the situation. It's not money the country needs, the country has more than enough money; it's men like your father there aren't enough of. Just imagine turning the means into an end and being proud of it! They are sick and mad, they don't work, they know nothing about the plow, they know only the dice. But aren't they deserving, aren't they ruining themselves with their lunacy? Look at them, they stake everything, after all? The only problem is that gambling is not a matter of bulldog courage, not even of courage, it's one of fear. Do you know what gambling is? It's a cold sweat on your forehead, that's what it is. The problem is they refuse to keep pace with life, wanting to go faster, they are in a rush, breaking into life like wedges. But then, of course, the flanks close in on them—stop, something is breaking, find a remedy, slow down, say the flanks! And so life crushes them politely, but firmly. Then begin the complaints about life, the rage against life! Everyone to his liking; some have probably reasons for complaint, others not, but no one should rage against life. They shouldn't be stern and righteous and hard on life, they should be merciful and stick up for it: keep in mind what sort of gamblers life must contend with!"

Coming to his senses again, Geissler says, "But let that be as it may." He is obviously tired, begins to yawn. "Are you going down?" he asks. "Yes."—"There's no hurry. My dear fellow, you owe me a long walk in the mountains, do you remember that? I remember everything. I remember from the time I was a year and a half at Oppigard Garmo, in Lom, and noticed a certain smell. I still know that smell. Let that be as it may, too; but we could've taken that walk in the mountains now if you didn't have that bag. What do you have in it?"—"Merchandise. It belongs to Andresen, he wants to sell it."—"Well, you see, I'm a man who knows what's right but doesn't do it," Geissler says. "That is to be taken literally. I'm the fog. I may buy back the mountain one of these days, it's not impossible; but if I do, I won't go around looking up at the sky and saying, 'Aerial cable! South America!' That's for the gamblers. Folks around here think I must be the devil himself since I knew a crash was coming. But there's nothing mystical about me, it's all so simple: the new copper beds in Montana. The Yankees are smarter gamblers than we are, they are competing us to death in South America; our pyrite ore is too poor. My son is the lightning, he was informed, and so I swam here. It's that simple. I was a few hours ahead of the Swedish gentlemen, that's all."

Geissler yawns again, gets up and says, "If you're heading down, let's go!"

They go down together, Geissler dangling behind, listless. The caravan has stopped at the pier, and the merry Fredrik Strøm is in full swing teasing Aaronsen. "I'm out of tobacco, would you have some?"—"I'll give you tobacco, all right!" Aaronsen answers. Fredrik laughs and comforts him, "You mustn't take it so hard, so seriously, Aaronsen. We'll just sell this merchandise right under your nose and then go home again."—"Go and wash your mouth!" Aaronsen cries, infuriated. "Ha-ha-ha, you mustn't jump about so badly. Try to be still, like a landscape."

Geissler is so tired, so tired; even his gray pince-nez is to no avail, his eyes keep closing in the spring sun. "Goodbye, Sivert, my boy!" he says suddenly. "I won't be able to come to Sellanrå this time, after all, tell your father that; I have so much to attend to. Say I'll come later."

Aaronsen spits after him and repeats, "He should've been shot!"

After three days the bags of the caravan are empty, with everything sold at good prices. It was a brilliant piece of business. There was still plenty of money around after the crash, and the people couldn't have been better used to spending it; they needed these birds on steel wires, which they put on the chest of drawers in the living room, and they also bought pretty paper knives to cut the pages of the almanac with. Aaronsen fumed: "As if I hadn't things every bit as pretty in my store!"

Aaronsen was in great distress; after all, he had meant to follow those peddlers and keep a watch on them, but they parted company and went their separate ways, and he tore himself to pieces trying to dog the footsteps of all three. First he gave up on Fredrik Strøm, who had the most unpleasant tongue, then on Sivert, because he never replied a single word but only sold. Aaronsen chose to follow his former assistant and to turn the folks against him. Oh, but Andresen knew his old master and was aware of his ignorance of business and forbidden wares. "Hm, isn't English sewing thread forbidden?" Aaronsen asked, pretending to be well-informed. "Yes," Andresen replied. "But I'm not toting spools of sewing thread here, those I can sell in the settlement. I don't have a single spool of thread with me, look for yourself!"—"However that may be. But you can see that I know what's forbidden, you won't teach me that."

Aaronsen bore up for one day before also giving up on Andresen and going home. The peddlers were no longer under surveillance.

It was at this point that they began to do exceedingly well. In those days womenfolk used tresses of false hair, and Andresen was a crackerjack at selling these tresses; in a pinch he would even sell fair tresses to dark-haired girls and could only regret that there weren't still fairer tresses, gray ones, because they were the most expensive. The boys met every evening at an agreed-upon place,

reporting on the day's trade and each borrowing from another articles he was sold out of. Andresen would often sit down with a file and erase a German trademark on a hunting whistle or remove "Faber" from the pencil cases. Andresen was a peach and always would be.

Sivert, on the other hand, was a disappointment. Not that he was lazy and didn't sell any merchandise—ho, he sold the most; but he got too little money for it. "You don't talk enough," Andresen said.

No, Sivert didn't talk in long jingles, he was a dweller in the wilds, quiet and trustworthy. What was there to talk about? Besides, Sivert wanted to be done before Sunday and get back home, the work season was upon them. "It's Jensine who's calling him," Fredrik Strøm said. For that matter, this same Fredrik had a spring planting to do himself and little time to waste; and yet he couldn't resist dropping by at Aaronsen's on the last day and getting up an argument with him. "I'll sell him the empty sacks," he said.

Andresen and Sivert were waiting outside while this was going on. They heard the most glorious wrangling from the store and now and then Fredrik's laughter; then Aaronsen opened the door and showed his visitor out. Oh, but Fredrik didn't come out, he took his time and talked a blue streak; the last they heard was that he tried to sell Aaronsen the rocking horses.

Then the caravan went homeward—three fellows overflowing with youth and health. They sang and walked, slept a few hours on the mountain and walked again. When they reached Sellanrå on Monday, Isak had begun to sow. The weather was right for it: the air moist, with occasional bursts of sun, and a huge rainbow stretching across the sky.

The caravan breaks up. Goodbye, goodbye. . . .

Isak is sowing, a water troll to look at, a stump. He is clad in homespun, the wool from his own sheep, his boots from his own calves and cows. He walks religiously bareheaded as he sows; his crown is bald, but otherwise he is outrageously hairy, with a wheel of hair and beard standing out from his head. This is Isak, the margrave.

He rarely knew an exact date, what use did he have for it? He had no papers to redeem, the crosses in the almanac had to do with when each of the cows was to calve. But he knew St. Olav's Day, gathering-in time, that by then he had already brought in dried hay, and he knew Holy Rood Day in spring and that three weeks after Holy Rood Day the bear left its winter lair: by then all seed was to be in the ground. He knew what was needed.

He is a settler in the wild through and through, a tiller of the soil without mercy. A figure resurrected from the past and pointing toward the future, a man from the first farm, a landnamsman, nine hundred years old, and again the man of the hour.

No, he had nothing left of the money for the copper mountain, it had blown away. Who had any left of it, now that the mountain once again lay deserted? But the common lies there with ten new farms, beckoning to hundreds more.

Nothing grows here? Everything grows here, man and beast and fruit of the soil. Isak sows. The evening sun shines on the grain, which radiates from his hand in a circle and sinks like a spray of gold into the ground. There comes Sivert to harrow; later he will use the roller and then harrow again. The forest and the mountains are watching, it is all sublime and majestic, there is meaning and purpose.

"Ting-a-ling!" the bells say far up the hillside; it gets closer and closer, the animals are coming home for the evening. There are fifteen cows and forty-five sheep and goats, three score all in all. There the womenfolk go to the summer dairy with their many milk pails, suspended from yokes on their shoulders; it is Leopoldine, Jensine and little Rebecca. All three of them are barefoot. The margravine, Inger herself, is not with them, she is indoors preparing supper. She walks slowly about her house, tall and stately, a vestal lighting a fire in the stove. Well and good. Inger has sailed on the high seas and lived in the city, now she is home again; the world is wide, swarming with tiny dots, Inger has swarmed with the rest. She was next to nothing among the living, only one.

Then comes the evening.